DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 309 344 CG 021 805

AUTHOR Hawkins, Joseph A.
TITLE The Early Experiences and Behavior of Students Suspended in Junior and Senior High School.
INSTITUTION Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, Md. Dept. of Educational Accountability.
PUB DATE Sep 88
NOTE 70p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attendance; Behavior Problems; Discipline; *Early Experience; *High Risk Students; High School Students; Intervention; Junior High School Students; *Predictor Variables; Secondary Education; Secondary Schools; *Student Behavior; *Suspension

ABSTRACT

This study investigated possible warning signs in students predicting future trouble with school suspensions. A year-long study of the school histories of 219 secondary students suspended numerous times from the Montgomery County Public Schools examined these students' early school experiences and behavior. Only two percent of students in grades 7-12 were suspended numerous times. Multiple suspendees differed noticeably from nonsuspendees or students suspended only once. Some of the areas of differences included participation in extracurricular activities, placement in special education programs, course grades, and school attendance. The five suspendee types identified are: fighter, student-in-crisis, truant, low achiever, and episodic. Data supported the contention that except for the episodic suspendee, predicting who will become a suspendee is possible. Different levels of success with correcting the misbehavior of suspendees had been experienced depending on the suspendee type. Late and inappropriate interventions contributed to intervention failure. The study's findings justify differentiating the treatment of students with discipline problems. (ABL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED309344

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

The Early Experiences and Behavior of Students Suspended in Junior and Senior High School

CG 021805

September 1988

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Hymes

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Harry Pitt
Superintendent of Schools

Prepared by the Department of Educational Accountability

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

The Early Experiences and Behavior of Students Suspended in Junior and Senior High School

By:

Joseph A. Hawkins

Steven M. Frankel, Director
Department of Educational
Accountability

Joy A. Frechtling, Director
Division of Instructional
Evaluation and Testing

PROJECT STAFF

Data Collection:	June Bogushefsky Barbara Murphy Paul Pryor
Data Entry and Analysis:	Paul Pryor

The author and the project staff wish to thank the registrars, counselors, and secretaries of Montgomery County Public Schools. Without their assistance, the review of student records could not have been completed.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Early Experiences and Behavior of Students Suspended in Junior and Senior High Schools

BACKGROUND

During the 1986-87 school year 2,478 secondary students were suspended from Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Most (62 percent) of these students were suspended from school once; however, slightly more than one-third (38 percent) of these students were suspended several times. Consider the following students:

- Sue, a 9th grader and youngest child from a family with 8 children, was a typical junior high student until her father died. Following her father's death Sue began cutting classes regularly, ignoring her school work, and talking back to teachers. It didn't take long before Sue had been suspended from school 10 times for a variety of infractions (fighting, insubordination, cutting class).

- John, a 9th grader, was suspended 6 times (mostly for fighting) during a two-month period. His grades, 11 D's and 6 F's, were so bad that year he was told to repeat the 9th grade. Out of anger and frustration John dropped out school, doing so in spite of the assistance his school was prepared to offer (placement in an on-the-job training program).

- Donna, a 10th grader, has been suspended 16 times during the last four school years. The majority of the suspensions were attendance related (cutting class or truancy). Donna's suspensions have kept her out of school 23 days; school days she cannot afford to miss considering she has been absent from school an average of 27 days a year since kindergarten.

- Wendy, a 9th grader, scores consistently at the 9th stanine on standardized tests. In spite of high test scores Wendy has been suspended 13 times over the past two school years for a variety of infractions (insubordination, breaking school rules, cutting class). Her suspensions during the 1984-85 school year kept her out of school 17 days. During the last three school years Wendy was absent more than 120 days.

For those students who get suspended once, and never in their school lives get suspended again, the punishment of being suspended from school may work. But for those students like Sue, John, Donna and Wendy, who are suspended multiple times, one must raise the question, "Does suspension work?" Despite being suspended numerous times these students continued to cause "trouble." What turned these students into "defiant trouble-makers?" When and where did the trouble start? Are there warning signs?

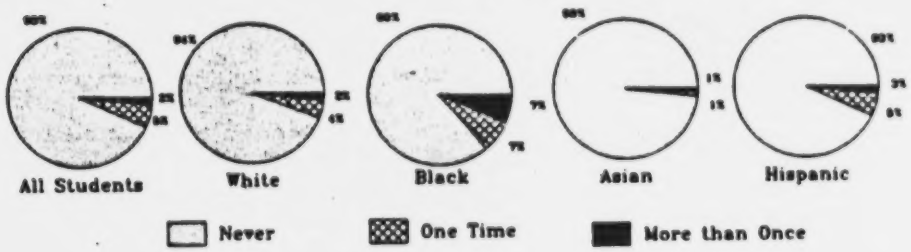
To answer these important questions a year-long study of the school histories of 219 students suspended numerous times in MCPS secondary schools was conducted during the 1986-87 school year. Specifically, this study examined the early school experiences and behavior of students suspended in MCPS secondary schools. Critical to this study were these two related concerns: 1) whether early indicators can be identified that predict later behavior problems, and 2) whether students evidencing problems in the early school years have received special supports intended to help them deal with these problems.

STUDY FINDINGS

MULTIPLE SUSPENDEES REPRESENT A VERY SMALL GROUP OF STUDENTS

Multiple suspendees represent a very small group of secondary students. Overall, MCPS students getting suspended multiple times over four consecutive school years (1982-83 through 1985-86) represent only 2 percent of all students in grades 7-12 (Figure 1). Five percent of the students in these grades were suspended one time only. The remaining 93 percent were never suspended from school. While differences do exist by racial/ethnic group (Figure 1)--blacks have the highest multiple suspension rate*--the absolute numbers are not in any case very large. If the number of multiple suspendees, systemwide, were evenly divided by the 40 MCPS secondary schools there would be no more than 25 students per school building. The fact that the number of multiple suspendees is small does not, however, lessen the importance of the problem or diminish the need to understand these students and find better ways of assisting them.

FIGURE 1
Percentage Never Suspended, Suspended Once, Suspended Multiple Times
Over Four Consecutive School Years



*The trend data reported here mask a positive five-year trend that has suspension rates declining for black students as well as all other MCPS secondary students. The five-year decline for black students, however, has been the most noticable, dropping from 16.9 percent for the 1983-84 school year to 10.9 percent for the 1987-88 school year.

MULTIPLE SUSPENDEES DIFFER FROM NONSUSPENDEES AND STUDENTS SUSPENDED ONE TIME

How Do Multiple Suspendees and Nonsuspendees Differ?

- Multiple suspendees are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities than are nonsuspendees. Over a three-year period, 73 percent of the nonsuspendees participated in at least one extracurricular activity; in comparison, 57 percent of the suspendees did the same.

- Multiple suspendees are more likely to come from a single parent home than are nonsuspendees. Fifty-two percent of the suspendees come from a single parent home compared to 26 percent of the nonsuspendees.

- Multiple suspendees are more mobile than are nonsuspendees. About 17 percent of the suspendees have lived at 4 or more different addresses while enrolled in MCPS compared to 7 percent of the nonsuspendees.

- Multiple suspendees are more likely to be placed in special education programs than are nonsuspendees. Seventeen percent of the suspendees have received special education services compared to 9 percent of the nonsuspendees.

- Multiple suspendees are more likely to be absent from school than are nonsuspendees. Annually, a typical suspendee misses 14 days of school while in comparison, a typical nonsuspendee misses 9 days of school.

- Multiple suspendees are more likely to lose credit in a course than are nonsuspendees. Nearly 30 percent of the suspendees lost credit; only 7 percent of the nonsuspendees lost credit in a course.

- Multiple suspendees are more likely to repeat a grade than are nonsuspendees. Thirty-four percent of the suspendees repeated one grade and 7 percent repeated at least two grades. In comparison, 19 percent of the non-suspendees repeated a grade and 2 percent repeated at least two grades.

- Multiple suspendees earn lower grades than nonsuspendees. The mean grade point average for suspendees is 1.49 while the grade point average for nonsuspendees is 2.26. The typical multiple suspendee receives mostly C's and D's in courses completed while the typical nonsuspendee received C's and B's in completed courses.

- Multiple suspendees are more likely to fail a Project Basic Test than are nonsuspendees. For example, the passing rate for suspendees on the Maryland Functional Math Test is 47 percent. In comparison, the passing rate for nonsuspendees is 66 percent.

How Do Multiple Suspendees and One-Time Suspendees Differ?

- Multiple suspendees are more likely to be suspended for fighting than are students suspended once (Figure 2). Nearly 34 percent of the suspensions given to multiple suspendees were for fighting. In comparison, 26 percent of the suspensions given to one-time suspendees were for fighting.

- Multiple suspendees are more likely to be suspended for insubordination than are students suspended once. Forty-two percent of the suspensions given to multiple suspendees were for insubordination. In comparison, 33 percent of the suspensions given to one-time suspendees were for insubordination. Multiple suspendees also are suspended more for verbal abuse of students and staff than are students suspended once.

- Multiple suspendees are less likely to be suspended for drug or alcohol abuse or attendance related problems, such as cutting class, than are students suspended once. For example, 15 percent of the suspensions given out to students suspended once were for an attendance related problem while in comparison roughly 6 percent of the suspensions given to multiple suspendees were for an attendance related problem.

MULTIPLE SUSPENDEES ARE NOT ALL ALIKE

Analysis of school history data on multiple suspendees shows that five distinct suspendee types exist. They are:

- **Fighter suspendees**,--students with a long history of suspensions, most for fighting and other aggressive actions.

- **Student-in-crisis suspendees**,--students unable to adjust to a short or long term crisis (e.g., family crisis-divorce or an abusive parent).

- **Truant suspendees**,--students with serious attendance/truancy problems.

- **Low-achiever suspendees**,--students with a history of academic learning problems, many of whom are learning disabled.

- **Episodic suspendees**,--students whose school records show no unusual problems--no truancy, no class cutting, no learning problems.

Figure 3 shows the relative frequency (percentage) of each type in the total multiple suspendee population.

FIGURE 2
Types of Suspensions Given: Multiple Suspendees vs. One-Time Suspendees

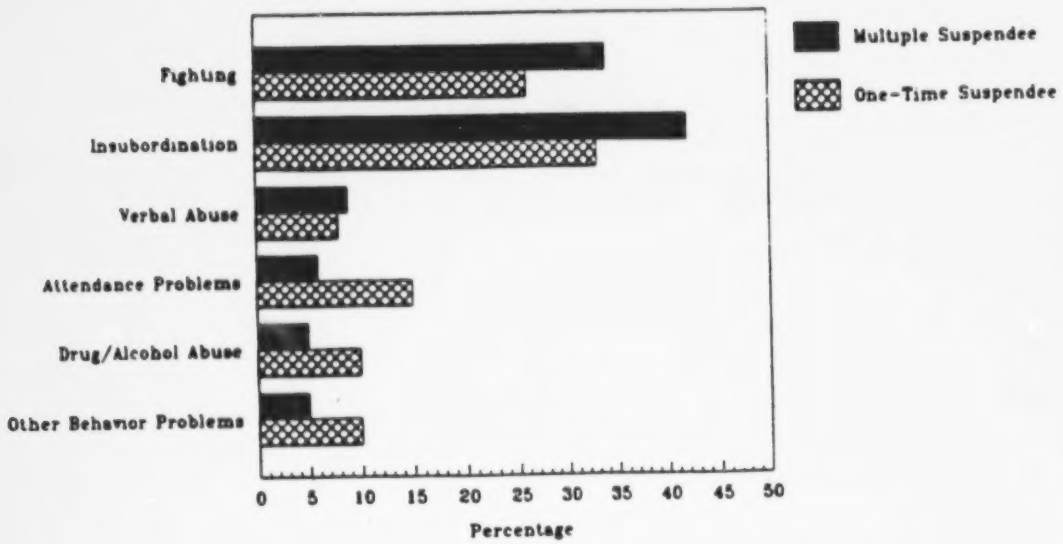
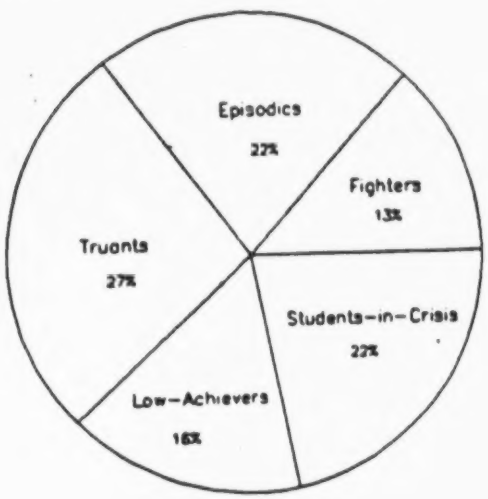


FIGURE 3
Composition of Suspendee Population



How Do the Five Multiple Suspendee Types Differ?

- The racial/ethnic composition of the five suspendee types varies noticably. In most situations, however, due the small sample sizes the variation is not statistically significant. Nearly half (48 percent) of the fighters are black students and 44 percent of the low-achievers are black students. The largest group of students-in-crisis are white students (41 percent), and the largest group of episodic suspendees are Asian and Hispanic students. (Data presented in Figure 4.)

- There are significant variations in the number of suspensions given to the five suspendee types. Fighters receive the most suspensions and episodic suspendees receive the fewest. On the average, fighters were suspended 8 times, students-in-crisis 6 times, truants 4 times, low-achievers 3 times, and episodic suspendees 2 times.

- There are significant variations in the type of suspensions given to the five suspendee types. For example, truants and students-in-crisis receive more suspensions for drug and alcohol abuse than do any of the other types. Nearly 10 percent of the suspensions given to truants and students-in-crisis were for drug and alcohol abuse; however, in comparison, less than 4 percent of the suspensions received by the other types were for the same reason.

- Participation in special programs varies significantly among the five suspendee types. Overall, less than 20 percent of the multiple suspendees participate or have participated in programs such as Head Start, Chapter 1, ESOL, and special education. Across these four programs, low-achievers have either the highest or second highest participation rate and episodic suspendees have the lowest participation rate.

- Participation in extracurricular activities varies significantly among the five suspendee types. Episodic suspendees (74 percent) have the highest participation rate and fighters (41 percent) have the lowest participation rate.

- Episodic suspendees are the best students and fighters are the worst. On the average, episodic suspendees have the highest grade point average, 2.13, and fighters have the lowest grade point average, 1.05. In addition, episodic suspendees have the lowest percentage, 10 percent, of students losing credit in courses taken, and fighters have the second highest percentage, 31 percent, of students losing credit.

- Mobility among the five suspendee types varies greatly. Truants and fighters are the most mobile groups and low-achievers are the least mobile of the five suspendee types.

- Truants are the oldest group of suspendees and students-in-crisis, fighters and low-achievers are the youngest. On the average, truants are 18-years-old, episodic suspendees are 17-years-old, and students-in-crisis, low-achievers, and fighters are 16-years-old.

FIGURE 4

Background Characteristics For Five Suspendee Types

	SUSPENDEE TYPE					
	Truant	Episodic	Student in Crisis	Low Achiever	Fighter	All Multiple Suspendees
Number	58	49	49	34	29	219
Mean Number of Suspensions	4.02	1.53*	5.73*	3.00	7.86*	4.20
% Suspended for Fighting	30%	39%	34%	31%	35%	34%
% Suspended for Insubordination	47*	39	39	42	45	42
% Suspended for Verbal Abuse	5	12*	7	13*	8	9
% Suspended for Attendance Problems .	7	4	8	3*	5	6
% Suspended for Drug/Alcohol Abuse ..	8*	2	7	3	2	5
% Suspended for Other Behavior Probs.	3	4	5	10*	7	5
% in Head Start.....	22	10*	10*	24	28*	18
% in Chapter One	16	7	0*	28*	15	12
% ESOL	12	26*	18	21	4*	16
% in Special Education	16	0*	16	48*	15	17
% in Extracurriculars	48	74*	51	68	41*	57
% Attending MCPS 7+ Years	78	65	53*	88	74	71
% From Single Parent Home	60	44	58	45	44	52
% Residing at 4+ Addresses	23	9*	18	3*	28	17
% Minority	60	74	59	77	62	66
% Black	38	25*	33	44	48	36
% Male	62	59	78	77	69	68
% Losing Credit	48*	10*	22	18	31	27
% Repeating a Grade	58	12*	31*	52	56	41
Mean Days Absent (per School Year) ..	21*	8*	15	9*	15	14
Mean Days Absent**	203*	63*	100	82*	138	124
Mean Age	18*	17	16	16	16	17
Mean Family Income (in thousands) ...	$32	$35	$34	$33	$36	$34
CAT Total Grd. 3 (NCE)	47	62*	57	34*	48	48
CAT Total Grd. 5 (NCE)	48	62*	55	38*	49	52
Md Functional Reading (% Passing) ...	74	92*	65	62	76	74
Md Functional Math (% Passing)	37	75*	48	27*	41	47
Md Functional Writing (% Passing) ...	47	77*	40	29*	48	49
Md Functional Citizenship (% Passing)	28	42	24	21*	17*	28
Grade Point Average	1.21	2.13*	1.46	1.49	1.05*	1.49

* Suspendee type differs statistically from other suspendee types. The percentage reported is either significantly more or less than what should normally be expected, or the number reported is significantly lower or higher than the mean for all multiple suspendees.

** Mean calculated across all years while attending MCPS.

TYPES CAN BE PREDICTED

Data support the contention that becoming a multiple suspendee is associated with certain events or characteristics (student and family), and with the exception of the episodic suspendee, predicting who will become a fighter, a truant, a low-achiever, and a student-in-crisis is possible. We are unable to predict who will become an episodic suspendee because the behavior of this student has no distinct pattern. However, the behavior of the other four suspendee types is more predictable. Figure 5, below, summarizes the events and factors that are associated with each suspendee type.

FIGURE 5
Factors/Events That Can be Used to Predict Types

Suspendee Type	Characteristic or Factor Associated With Type
Fighter	o involved in a serious fight early in junior high years o contact with the juvenile justice system o highly mobile family (mobility within county) o poor academic performance (low grades) o little involvement in school life o close friendships with other disruptive students o perceives self as "school trouble-maker" o feels isolated and alone at school
In-Crisis	o involvement in a serious family crisis/trauma o recently enrolled MCPS (new to system) o family headed by single parent o slightly younger than classmates o drug or alcohol abuse
Truant	o pattern of poor school attendance, starting in early elementary grades o drug or alcohol abuse o family headed by single parent o highly mobile family (mobility within county) o may come from low-income family
Low-Achiever	o consistent poor academic performance o may be learning disabled o likely Head Start or Chapter 1 participant o may come from low-income family o low California Achievement Test scores (3rd stanine or below)

CORRECTING THE BEHAVIOR OF MULTIPLE SUSPENDEES: NOT ENOUGH HELP AND PROBLEMS

About half of the multiple suspendees' records document a specific action taken by a school to correct misbehaving. This finding, however, varies with the type of suspendee. For example, 71 percent of the students-in-crisis had a specific action taken to correct misbehaving, and 55 percent of the fighters had an action taken to correct their problems. The most common action taken was to arrange for the suspendee to receive counseling. The type of counseling ranged from drop-in visits to the school guidance counselor to weekly therapy sessions with a psychologist. Schools also favored assigning suspendees to alternative schools/programs such as The Other Way, Kingsley Wilderness, Gateway, or to the Work Oriented Curriculum Program.

While in many cases these interventions were successful in others they failed to change significantly the student's behavior. We cannot say definitively why some interventions failed, but our analysis strongly suggest that two factors played a major role: 1) the intervention is sometimes too late or; 2) the intervention is not well matched to the problem of the suspendee.

1. Intervention Too Late. Records show that in many situations efforts to assist suspendees don't come soon enough. This problem is especially true for the truant suspendee. Most truants have a long history of documented attendance problems beginning in the elementary grades. Records failed to uncover, however, specific actions taken to correct these problems. Many truants attendance problems were not addressed formally until the student started junior high school. By then a pattern of truancy, and concomitant dysfunctional behaviors, may be firmly established.

   The issue of when help arrives and how it is received has a great deal to do with the involvement of parents. The school cannot address the problem alone. The fact that many truants develop poor attendance habits in the early elementary grades is clearly a problem that parents are, and must, be involved with. MCPS, however, needs to seek better ways to address this problem. Parent involvement techniques currently used by the Head Start program also might work with the parents of truants. These interventions come early and they make the parent responsible for the development of healthy school habits.

2. Intervention Not Matching The Problem. Records show that in many situations help offered to suspendees did not match the needs of the suspendee. The mismatch occurs as the results of 1) not getting help to suspendees early when the help is most needed and 2) not understanding the problems facing a suspendee (e.g., a student living with an abusive parent). Take the case of Wendy, a suspendee introduced on page E-1. To overcome her truancy problem Wendy was placed in a WOC program. This vocational program is designed for students who are potential dropouts and are disadvantaged economically

or academically. Wendy was a potential dropout but she was not disadvantaged. In fact, a review of her records shows a very smart student who happened to be suffering from a very poor family situation (i.e., custody battle). But by the time the dust settled at home, the only option the school had for Wendy was WOC. Getting Wendy to come to school, even if it meant coming as a WOC student was viewed as a victory. But was it a good victory or the best victory?

PROMISING SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS

Schools seem to recognize the need to try new things with students who misbehave repeatedly. A variety of efforts were uncovered aimed precisely at dealing innovatively with these students' problems. While we did not evaluate the effectiveness of these practices, informal data available on these programs show that these programs do hold promise. Brief descriptions of some of these promising practices follow.

- **Attendance Contracts.** Gaithersburg and Montgomery Blair High Schools are using attendance contracts to improve student attendance.

- **Parent Involvement Programs.** The Kennedy High School cluster is having success in reducing suspensions through a parent involvement program. During the 1986-87 school year, Kennedy High School used a mini-grant to established a parent involvement program called Project REACH (Reaching Educational Achievement through Community Help). Kennedy's suspension rate fell from 4.4 percent to 2.9 percent during the 1986-87 school year.

- **Programs for Truants** Two examples of successful school-based programs, both designed with truancy in mind, are the "Getting Ourselves Together" (GOT) program at Gaithersburg Junior High School and the "Changing Habits to Offer Individual Choices in Education" (CHOICE) program at Parkland Junior High School. Both of these programs achieve success by offering the "at-risk" student a unique personalized academic program within the regular school. During the first year, the suspension rate for GOT participants dropped 82 percent.

- **School Leadership Teams.** Several secondary schools are trying a unique intervention program with "trouble-makers." These schools are taking regular student government leaders and "trouble-makers" with leadership potential on a 3-day retreat and teaching them leadership skills. The assumption is that once the "trouble-maker" is shown how to use his/her skills in the proper way, misbehaving will decline. The impact of this program is not known. But it is known that students who are involved in school through extracurricular activities are less likely to misbehave, and be suspended from school, than are students who are not involved.

- **The Mentor/SAGE (Serving As Guides in Education).** Currently, 13 schools are using the Mentor/SAGE program developed by the Department of Quality Integrated Education to reduce the suspensions of minority students. The impact of this program is not known at this time. However, several schools using the program have witnessed large declines in the number of students suspended. For example, at Eastern Intermediate School the overall suspension rate dropped from 9.1 to 1.9 in one year.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate the need for us to treat suspendees or "discipline problems" differently. Not all suspendees are alike, and some of the stereotypic views we hold about suspendees simply aren't true. For example, not all suspendees are low-achievers or students with academic problems. Nor are all suspendees hostile and aggressive. Students misbehave for different reasons; changing their behavior requires different solutions.

During the last several school years MCPS has made great strides in reducing the use of suspensions for disciplining students. Overall suspension rates have dropped; findings from this study show that MCPS does a very good job of helping certain suspendees, particularly students-in-crisis and low-achievers. Despite the progress of the past several years there is more work to be done. Of special concern are truants and fighters (40 percent of the multiple suspendee population), as they are the students with whom MCPS has had the least amount of success. Truants and fighters, however, can be helped and based on our findings we suggest the following actions:

- **Earlier Intervention in the Elementary Schools.** For some suspendees such as truants, when the school intervenes to correct behavior, it is just as important as what is done when the school intervenes. Study findings for truants show that, typically, very little is done formally for these students prior to junior high school. Breaking the truant's bad attendance habits has to come early and at a period of time when the bad habits are developing. The data show that most truants begin to miss school consistently at a very early age, some have established bad attendance habits by the end of kindergarten.

  Currently, monthly computerized reports for every school listing students who have been absent 25 percent of the time are distributed to Pupil Personnel Workers (PPW's) in each Area Office. These reports are useful because they help PPW's identify truants; similar reports also would be useful in the schools who now are left on there own to keep track of truants. In addition, the reports might be modified to highlight students with a previous pattern of poor attendance. What to do once a student is identified remains an important issue. We do not know the answer but our findings suggest that some kind of intervention involving both the child and his family is needed. One tool that might be useful, and has met with success at the secondary

level, is the attendance contract. Elementary schools could consider such contracts with the parents of truants. Another tool is the parenting programs used by Head Start and Chapter 1. These programs have a very strong emphasis on teaching parenting skills, and forming school/parent partnerships that benefit the student.

Early intervention also is highly recommended for fighters. Findings tell us that many fighters' troubles started after being involved in a serious fight in the early junior high years. Some fights do lead to other fights. Schools should use this knowledge to prevent further troubles from developing. This would be an ideal time for the school to lessen the impact of that fight through some type of mandatory counseling or aggressive crisis intervention (see discussion below).

- **Establish More Support Groups.** Support groups run by guidance counselors, or operated with the assistance of peer counselors, have been growing in popularity in MCPS schools for sometime (e.g., the Peer Counseling Program at Paint Branch High School). Many of these groups aggressively seek out students who are experiencing a crisis in their lives. For example, West Middle School and Pyle Intermediate School counselors aggressively seek out students who experience an unexpected death in the family and, through weekly group counseling sessions, support the student through this ordeal that possibly could cause the student to either misbehave or fall behind academically at school. In short, these schools have taken specific steps and actions to "prevent" students from misbehaving. Expanding these efforts to more schools, under the supervision of the Guidance Unit, is highly recommended.

  There is no reason why similar support groups couldn't be expanded or modified to handle fighters. A student involved in a first-time fight might be prevented from fighting again with the right kind of support. In addition to suspending the student, the suspendee should be required to participate in a support group made up other fighters and potential fighters. The support group's intention would be to help these students develop other means of settling differences other than fighting. Support groups can operate effectively in schools, and they currently do without a great deal of cost or direct supervision from school staff.

- **More Cooperation Between MCPS and County Agencies.** Currently, PPW's meet informally with staff members from key county agencies to discuss solutions to the problems facing truants. Informal solutions are suggested and tried, and if they fail to alter behavior, county agencies become involved formally. The informal discussions are not mandatory. Perhaps a more effective way to alleviate the problems of truants and in some situations fighters is to incorporate the current informalities into a more formal process. We don't need a new level of bureaucracy, but we do need the establishment of a more formal commitment to work together to solve the problems. MCPS can't solve

the problem of truancy on its own. More cooperation and support from agencies such as Juvenile Services Administration and the Maryland Department of Social Services is required.

- **Establish More Specialized School-Based Programs.** Previously highlighted were several programs that individual schools had established for truants. The support of more programs of this nature is needed and highly recommended. These programs also might include variations on the Mentor/Sage Program.

Finally, we must realize that suspending students from school doesn't work for all students and in some situations, the suspension is really a very poor and even counterproductive option. It isn't logical to suspend a truant from school for not coming to school or cutting classes. Other methods are needed to handle these students--preferably, methods that instill in the student the desire and motivation to come to school and go to classes.

STUDY FACTS

Who asked for the study:	The study was requested by an Ad Hoc Committee, formed by the Superintendent of Schools. This study was one of four activities, implemented by THE MCPS SUSPENSION PROJECT.
When study was conducted:	Data Collection - December 1986 - June 1987 Analysis - July 1987 - November 1987
Author:	Joseph A. Hawkins
Ad Hoc Committee:	Paul Vance, Co-Chair Paul Pryor, Co-Chair Frank Bready, Sherion Cosby, Judy Covich, Frances Edlovitch, Penny Finch, John Goodloe, Michael Graban, Robert Hacker, Sylvia Johnson, Ann Meyer, Lucinda Sullivan, Rita Teresa, Richard Towers, Walter Varner
Data Collection Methods and Samples:	

Student Records, Cumulative Folder & Pupil Data Base
- 219 Multiple Suspendees (randomly selected)
- 170 Nonsuspendees (randomly selected)

Focus Groups, 6 groups of identified "troublemakers"
- Black males at MCPS Middle School
- Black males at MCPS Senior High School
- Hispanic males at MCPS Senior High School
- White males at MCPS Senior High School
- White males at MCPS Junior High School
- White males at MCPS Junior High School

Parent Interviews
- 83 parents of multiple suspendees

School Staff Interviews
- 48 school based staff (in focus schools only)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter 1 - Introduction and Background	1
Chapter 2 - How the Study of Multiple Suspendees Was Conducted	3
Chapter 3 - Are Suspended Kids Different?	5
Chapter 4 - Multiple Suspendees Are Not All Alike	10
Chapter 5 - The Fighter Suspendee	16
Chapter 6 - The Student-In-Crisis Suspendee	20
Chapter 7 - The Truant Suspendee	25
Chapter 8 - The Low-Achieving Suspendee	31
Chapter 9 - The Episodic Suspendee	35
Chapter 10 - Conclusions	38
Chapter 11 - Implications and Recommendations	43
Appendix A - The MCPS Suspension Project	46
Appendix B - Findings From the Survey of Parents	47

The Early Experiences and Behavior of Students Suspended in Junior and Senior High Schools

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

During the 1986-87 school year 2,478 secondary students were suspended from Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Most (62 percent) of these students were suspended from school once; however, slightly more than one-third (38 percent) of these students were suspended several times. Consider the following students:

- Sue, a 9th grader and youngest child from a family with 8 children, was a typical junior high student until her father died. Following her father's death Sue began cutting classes regularly, ignoring her school work, and talking back to teachers. It didn't take long before Sue had been suspended from school 10 times for a variety of infractions (fighting, insubordination, cutting class).

- John, a 9th grader, was suspended 6 times (mostly for fighting) during a two-month period. His grades, 11 D's and 6 F's, were so bad that year he was told to repeat the 9th grade. Out of anger and frustration John dropped out school, doing so in spite of the assistance his school was prepared to offer (placement in an on-the-job training program).

- Donna, a 10th grader, has been suspended 16 times during the last four school years. The majority of the suspensions were attendance related (cutting class or truancy). Donna's suspensions have kept her out of school 23 days; school days she cannot afford to miss considering she has been absent from school an average of 27 days a year since kindergarten.

- Wendy, a 9th grader, scores consistently at the 9th stanine on standardized tests. In spite of high test scores Wendy has been suspended 13 times over the past two school years for a variety of infractions (insubordination, breaking school rules, cutting class). Her suspensions during the 1984-85 school year kept her out of school 17 days. During the last three school years Wendy was absent more than 120 days.

For those students who get suspended once and never in their school lives get suspended again, the punishment of being suspended from school may work. But for those students like Sue, John, Donna and Wendy, who are suspended multiple times, one must raise the question, "Does suspension work?" Despite being suspended numerous times, these students continue to cause "trouble." What turned these students into "defiant trouble-makers?" When and where did the trouble start? Are there warning signs that could have been heeded?

During the 1986-87 school year, a year long study[1] of the school histories of 219 students suspended numerous times in MCPS secondary schools reveals that there are warning signs along the way. There are significant events that take place in the lives of these students that contributed to the way these students behave. Understanding the warning signs and knowing how to recognize the significant events in these students' lives would do much to help MCPS prevent students from ever being suspended in the first place.

---

1. This study is part of The MCPS Suspension Project. See Appendix A for a description of the project.

Chapter 2

HOW THE STUDY OF MULTIPLE SUSPENDEES WAS CONDUCTED

The Sample

The sample, randomly selected, consisted of 219 multiple suspendees and 170 nonsuspendees. All students were enrolled in MCPS during the 1985-86 and 1986-87 school years. For the suspendee sample, preference was given to students suspended for disrespect/insubordination or fighting with students or teachers. Such a preference was given because suspensions in these areas are the greatest problem areas in most secondary schools. In addition, the suspendee group was oversampled to include students with unique suspension histories (e.g., students who had been suspended numerous times across three school years). Finally, to ensure that the only substantial difference between suspendees and nonsuspendees was the fact that suspendees had been suspended from school many times while nonsuspendees had not, suspendees and nonsuspendees were matched carefully regarding such factors as race, sex, grade and achievement test scores.

Data Sources and Collection

Several sources of data were used in the study. Each student's cumulative school folder was reviewed. Data taken from the student's records included information such as:

- family background information (e.g., number of siblings, birth order)
- attendance
- special education services
- number of times student moved while enrolled in MCPS
- courses taken along with grades earned
- parent involvement with suspensions

The MCPS pupil data base contains numerous types of information about students presently and recently enrolled in MCPS. Relevant information from the pupil data base was reviewed. Information extracted from the data base included:

- California Achievement Tests results
- Project Basic Tests results
- student participation history in extracurricular activities
- suspensions prior to the 1985-86 school year (number of suspensions)
- participation in Head Start or Chapter 1

Data on family income were taken from the most recently available Census report (1979). Census block data were matched to a school's attendance block and then aggregated to the school level.

Focus groups were conducted with suspendees to understand in greater and personal detail why some suspendees behave the way they do. Groups were conducted with suspendees at five secondary schools. The groups were conducted

to gather information and insights into such issues as:

- o parental reaction (Do your parents see you as a discipline problem?)
- o steps school staff take to prevent suspendees from being suspended (What did the school staff do to help you stay out of trouble?)
- o perception of self-behavior (Do suspendees see themselves as bad kids?)

Parent interviews were conducted over the telephone and covered such issues as:

- o when parents thought their child's discipline problems began
- o what schools had done to improve child's behavior
- o what parents had done to improve child's behavior
- o factors that contributed the most to child's discipline problems

Staff interviews were conducted in the schools with staff that suspendees (who had participated in the focus groups) had identified as being helpful ("Someone the suspendee felt he could talk to about anything.") Staff members were asked to share insights into suspendee's school behavior. Staff members were asked to respond to such questions as:

- o Is the suspendee a trouble-maker?
- o Did suspension(s) improve the suspendee's behavior?
- o What did the school do to improve the student's behavior?
- o Why does the suspendee get along so well with you?

Chapter 3

ARE SUSPENDED KIDS DIFFERENT?

After a careful review of suspension data for MCPS secondary schools, it is hard to argue against the usefulness and value of suspensions. Overall, the punishment of being suspended from school works in the sense that it deters the majority of students from misbehaving further. But it is also hard to argue against the fact that being suspended does not work for many students. For some students, being suspended from school does not deter future misbehavior. Consider the following suspension facts for MCPS secondary schools:

- During four school years, 1982-83 through 1985-86, MCPS suspended 10,479 students. These suspended students accounted for 22,800 suspensions.

- Sixty-two percent of the 10,479 suspendees were suspended one time only; the remaining suspendees, 38 percent, were suspended an average of 4.4 times. Black students stand the best chance of being suspended more than once, and Asian students stand the best chance of being suspended one time only. The percentage of students suspended one time only for each race/ethnic group is 73 percent for Asians, 65 percent for Hispanics, 63 percent for Whites, and 53 percent for Blacks.

- About 1200 students were suspended 4 or more times. These students represent 12 percent of the suspendees and were suspended an average of 7.2 times.

- It is more common to get suspended many times during one given school year than it is to be suspended many times over several school years. However, getting suspended several times during several school years happens to a sizable number of students; 23 percent of the 10,479 suspendees were suspended several times during several school years. And 5 percent of all suspendees, (537 students) were suspended from school during three or more different school years.

Understanding the behavior of students who get suspended numerous times is the major purpose of this study. If we know more about why these suspendees misbehaved, we might be able to prevent many of them from misbehaving again. Further, understanding the behavior of the multiple suspendees also might help prevent other students from ever becoming multiple suspendees, or from being suspended in the first place.

One of the most important keys to understanding the behavior of multiple suspendees is knowing more about how they differ from nonsuspendees and students suspended one-time. Data reported on the pages that follow show that multiple suspendees differ noticeably from nonsuspended students on a number of key variables, and they frequently behave differently than students suspended once.

Multiple Suspendees Differ From Nonsuspendees

Exhibit 1 presents background data on multiple suspendees and nonsuspendees. Data were taken from the MCPS pupil data base and students' cumulative school folders. Both groups were selected randomly from students enrolled in MCPS during the 1985-86 and 1986-87 school years. The data show the following:

- **Multiple suspendees are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities than are nonsuspendees.** During a three year period, 73 percent of the nonsuspendees participated in at least one extracurricular activity. In comparison, 57 percent of the suspendees did the same.

- **Multiple suspendees are more likely to come from a single parent home than are nonsuspendees.** Fifty-two percent of the suspendees come from a single parent home compared to 26 percent of the nonsuspendees.

- **The overwhelming majority, 71 percent, of multiple suspendees and nonsuspendees have been enrolled in MCPS for seven or more years.** During those years suspendees have been more mobile than nonsuspendees. About 17 percent of the suspendees have lived at 4 or more different addresses while enrolled in MCPS compared to 7 percent of the nonsuspendees.

- **Multiple suspendees are more likely to be placed in special education than are nonsuspendees.** Seventeen percent of the suspendees have received special education services compared to 9 percent of the nonsuspendees.

- **Multiple suspendees are more likely to be absent from school than are nonsuspendees.** Annually, a typical suspendee misses 14 days of school while a typical nonsuspendee misses 9 days of school.

- **Multiple suspendees are more likely to lose credit in a course than are nonsuspendees.** Nearly 30 percent of the suspendees lost credit while only 7 percent of the nonsuspendees lost credit in a course.

- **Multiple suspendees are more likely to repeat a grade than are nonsuspendees.** Thirty-four percent of the suspendees repeated one grade and 7 percent repeated at least two grades. In comparison, 19 percent of the nonsuspendees repeated one grade and 2 percent repeated at least two grades.

- **Multiple suspendees earn lower grades than nonsuspendees.** The mean grade point average for suspendees is 1.49 while the grade point average for nonsuspendees is 2.26. The typical multiple suspendee receives mostly C's and D's in courses completed while the typical nonsuspendee received C's and B's in completed courses.

- **Multiple suspendees are more likely to fail a Project Basic Test than are nonsuspendees.** For example, the passing rate for suspendees on the Maryland Functional Math Test is 47 percent. The passing rate for nonsuspendees is 66 percent.

EXHIBIT 1
Background Characteristics of Multiple Suspendees and Nonsuspendees

Characteristic	Multiple Suspendee	Nonsuspendee
Number	219	170
% In Head Start	18%	19%
% In Chapter 1	12	7
% In ESOL	16	11
% In Special Education	17	9 *
% In Extracurriculars	57	73 *
% Attending MCPS 7+ Years	71	71
% From Single Parent Home	52	26 *
% Residing at 4+ Addresses	17	7
% Minority	66	61
% Male	68	66
% Losing Credit	27	7 *
% Repeating a Grade	41	21 *
Mean Days Absent (per School Year)	14	9 *
Mean Days Absent**	124	79 *
Mean Age	17	16
Mean Family Income (in thousands)	$34	$41 *
CAT Total Grd. 3 (NCE)	48	56 *
CAT Total Grd. 5 (NCE)	52	59 *
Md. Functional Reading (% Passing)	74	76
Md. Functional Math (% Passing)	47	66 *
Md. Functional Writing (% Passing)	49	66 *
Md. Functional Citizenship (% Passing)	28	40 *
Grade Point Average	1.49	2.26 *

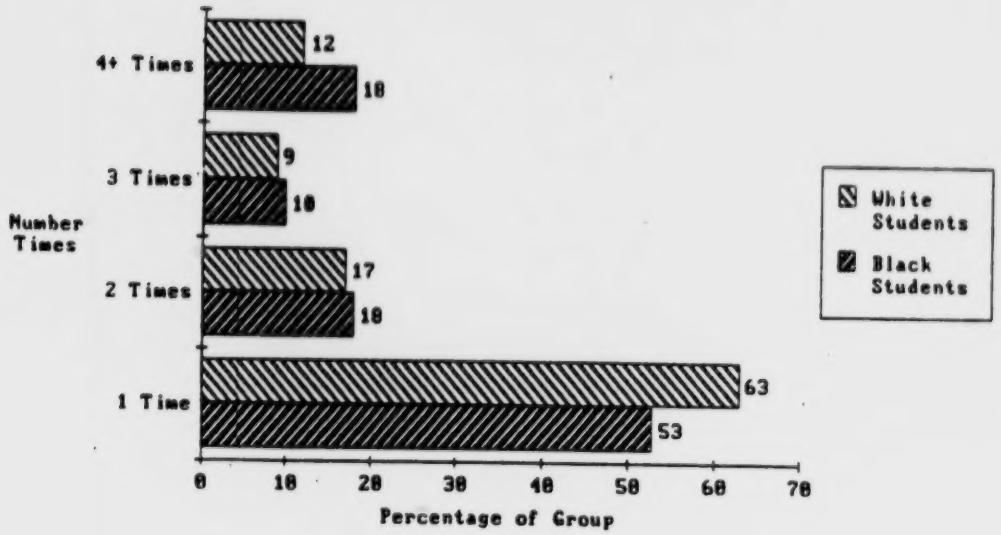
* The two groups differ statistically
** Mean calculated across all years while attending MCPS

Multiple Suspendees Differ From One-Time Suspendees

Important differences also exist between multiple suspendees and one-time suspendees. These differences are summarized in Exhibits 2 and 3. The data show that:

- **Black students make up a disproportionate number of students suspended multiple times.** Forty-six percent of the Black suspendees are multiple suspendees (i.e., suspended more than once); in comparison, 38 percent of the White suspendees are multiple suspendees (see Exhibit 2 below). Thirty-five percent of the Hispanic suspendees and 27 percent of the Asian suspendees get suspended more than once.

EXHIBIT 2
Whites vs. Blacks: Number of Times Suspended



- **Multiple suspendees are more likely to be suspended for fighting than are students suspended once.** Nearly 34 percent of the suspensions given to multiple suspendees were for fighting while 26 percent of the suspensions given to one-time suspendees were for fighting.

- **Multiple suspendees are more likely to be suspended for insubordination than are students suspended once.** Forty-two percent of the suspensions given to multiple suspendees were for insubordination while 33 percent of the suspensions given to one-time suspendees were for insubordination. Multiple suspendees are also suspended more for verbal abuse of students and staff than are students suspended once (9 percent versus 6 percent).

- **Multiple suspendees are less likely to be suspended for drug or alcohol abuse or attendance related problems such as cutting class than are students suspended once.** For example, 15 percent of the suspensions given out to students suspended once were for an attendance related problem while in comparison roughly 6 percent of the suspensions given to multiple suspendees were for an attendance related problem.

EXHIBIT 3
Types of Suspensions Given: Multiple Suspendees vs. One-Time Suspendees

Reason for Suspension	Multiple Suspendee	One-Time Suspendee
	Percentage Given[1]	
% Suspended for Fighting	34%	26%[2]
% Suspended for Insubordination	42	33
% Suspended for Verbal Abuse	9	6
% Suspended for Attendance Problems	6	15
% Suspended for Drug/Alcohol Abuse	5	10
% Suspended for Other Behavior Problems	5	10

1. Percentage given is based on the total number of suspensions given out over four school years, 1982-83 through 1985-86. Due to rounding, percentage may add to slightly more than 100.
2. Suspendees and one-time suspendees differ statistically for each type of suspension.

Chapter 4

MULTIPLE SUSPENDEES ARE NOT ALL ALIKE

Based on how they behave, it might be fair to conclude that many multiple suspendees are "trouble-makers" or "malcontents"--nearly all have been suspended for fighting or disrespecting school staff. But causing trouble alone does not mean that suspendees are all alike. Jumping to that conclusion would be a mistake. A review of suspendees' school records reveals multiple suspendees are not all alike. Distinct suspendee types or suspendee profiles can be developed from school records and other pertinent information obtained from suspendees.

Five Suspendee Types

Guided by the education literature on delinquent and disruptive students, five suspendee types were derived from a careful, individual review of each multiple suspendees' complete school history and supporting information from suspendees, parents of suspendees and school staff.[2] In addition, the five suspendee types were validated statistically.[3] The five suspendee types are:

1. Fighter suspendee
2. Student-in-crisis suspendee
3. Truant suspendee
4. Low-achiever suspendee
5. Episodic or transient suspendee

A description of each type and the criteria used to develop the type follows, in order from the type suspended the most to the type suspended the least. A summary of the criteria used to develop each type appears in Exhibit 4, and Exhibit 5 reflects the extent to which the entire multiple suspendee populations is made up of the five suspendee types.

- **Fighter suspendees** are students with a long history of suspensions, most for fighting and other aggressive actions. Fighters make up 13 percent of the suspendee sample. **Criteria used to develop type:** 1) school-wide reputation as "trouble-maker" or student who has been characterized as hostile or aggressive; 2) previously institutionalized in a place such as the Noyes Children Center; and 3) no academic or learning problems.

---

2. The five suspendee types are consistent with what the literature tells us about disruptive students. See the following articles. Zakariya, S. 1987. "Fair, Unfailing Discipline Is the Least Schools Owe to Delinquent Kids." The American School Board Journal. 23-29. Myers, D. and others. 1987. "Student Discipline and High School Performance," Sociology of Education. 60:18-33. Gottfredson, G. and Daiger, D. 1979. Disruption in Six Hundred Schools. Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University.

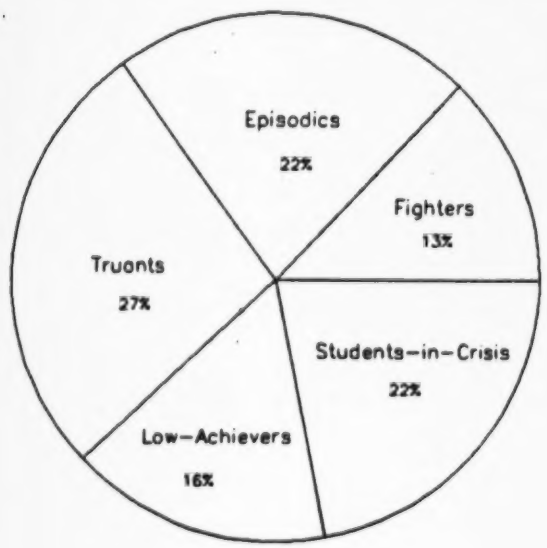
3. The suspendee types were validated using the statistical procedure discriminant analysis. Discriminant analysis allows the researcher to actually determine if groups or types of individuals truly differ from one another along a variety of factors such as achievement, race, or participation in Head Start.

EXHIBIT 4
Criteria Used to Develop Suspendee Types

Criteria Used	SUSPENDEE TYPE				
	Truant	Episodic	Student in Crisis	Low Achiever	Fighter
Aggressive Behaviors Noted by School	No[1]	No	No	No	Yes[2]
Attendance (Days Absent)/Truancy	Yes	No	Possible[3]	No	No
Class Cutting/Loss of Credit	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Drug or Alcohol Addiction	No	No	Yes	No	No
Emotionally Disabled	No	No	Possible	No	No
Family Crisis	No	No	Yes	No	No
Health Problem	No	No	Yes	No	No
Law Involvement	No	No	Possible	No	Possible
Learning Disabled	No	No	No	Yes	No
Low Test Scores (Below Stanine 4)	No	No	No	Yes	No
Reputation As "Trouble-maker"	No	No	No	No	Yes
Retained in a Grade	No	No	No	Yes	No
Transfer Student	No	No	Yes	No	No

1. Not a primary problem experienced by suspendee
2. Primary problem experienced by suspendee
3. Secondary problem experienced by suspendee

EXHIBIT 5
Composition of Multiple Suspendee Population



- **Student-in-crisis suspendees** are students unable to adjust to a short- or long-term crisis (e.g., family crisis-divorce or an abusive parent, a traumatic move experienced by an ESOL student new to the USA, or personal problem such as drug addiction). Students-in-crisis make up 22 percent of the suspendee sample. **Criteria used to develop type**: 1) drug or alcohol addiction noted in suspendee's record; 2) placement in a Level 5 special education program (e.g., RICA) or interagency/alternative program (e.g., Kingsley Wilderness); 3) clear, identified family or personal problem (e.g., death of a parent); and 4) transfer students unable to adjust to MCPS (as noted by school, parent or student).

- **Truant suspendees** are students with serious attendance or truancy problems. Truants make up 27 percent of the suspendee sample. Most of these students have a long history of attendance problems. **Criteria used to develop type**: 1) truancy or class cutting identified as serious problem by school (in some cases, truancy begins in the early elementary grades); and 2) suspendee's average days absent was at least 20 days for 3 consecutive school years.

- **Low-achiever suspendees** are students with a history of academic learning problems. Many of the these suspendees have been placed in a special education program for a specific learning disability. Low-achievers make up 16 percent of the suspendee sample. **Criteria used to develop type**: 1) retained in a grade; 2) low achievement test scores (low 3 stanines); 3) learning problem noted in school records; and 4) placement in special education program for a specific learning disability.

- **Episodic suspendees** are students whose school records show no unusual problems--no truancy, no class cutting, no learning problems. Episodic suspendees make up 22 percent of the suspendee sample. **Criteria used to develop type**: 1) suspendee's school history was void of any noticeable or serious problems (e.g., no attendance or learning problems); and 2) suspension pattern was episodic in nature, that is, student would be suspended multiple times over a very short period of time never to be suspended again (pattern would not be repeated).

It is extremely important to point out that some suspendees do suffer multiple problems and putting a label on these suspendees was difficult. It is possible to find some overlap between the five suspendee types. For example, many of the suspendees labeled students-in-crisis display the same aggressive and hostile behavior as many fighters do, and some cut class as frequently as truants do. It would have been easy to label some of these students-in-crisis fighters or truants; however, careful reviews of these suspendees' records always turned up a significant crisis/event that seemed to mark the beginning of the suspendee's misbehaving. We will find in the discussion that follows that, in spite of the problem of overlapping, there are real, distinct differences between the five suspendee types. The issue of overlapping types is a concern. It is not a significant enough problem, however, to negate the validity of the five suspendee types.

Differences Between the Five Suspendee Types

Major differences between the five suspendee types are summarized with data reported in Exhibit 6. The data show differences along a variety of issues, such as type of suspensions received, participation in special programs and extracurricular activities, performance in the classroom, and family structure. It is important to note that many of the differences between the types are the result of the criteria used to create the suspendee types. For example, it should not be surprising that the achievement test scores of low-achiever suspendees are lower than any of the other suspendee types. Low achievement test scores were used as one of the criteria to create low-achiever suspendees.

Statistical differences between the suspendee types are highlighted below.

- **There is significant variation in the number of suspensions given to the five suspendee types.** Fighters receive the most suspensions and episodic suspendees receive the fewest suspensions. On the average, fighters were suspended 8 times, students-in-crisis 6 times, truants 4 times, low-achievers 3 times, and episodic suspendees 2 times.

- **There are significant variations in the reasons for suspensions given to the five suspendee types.** For example, truants and students-in-crisis receive more suspensions for drug and alcohol abuse than do any of the other suspendee types. Nearly 10 percent of the suspensions given to truants and students-in-crisis were for drug and alcohol abuse; less than 4 percent of the suspensions received by the other suspendee types were for the same reason. Low-achievers receive more suspensions for verbal abuse than do any of the other four suspendee types. Thirteen percent of the suspensions given to low-achievers were for verbal abuse; less than 10 percent of the suspensions given out to the other suspendee types were for verbal abuse.

- **Participation in special programs varies significantly among the five suspendee types.** Overall, less than 20 percent of the multiple suspendees participate or have participated in programs such as Head Start, Chapter 1, ESOL, and special education. Across these four programs, low-achievers have either the highest or second highest participation rate, and episodic suspendees have the lowest participation rate.

- **Participation in extracurricular activities varies significantly among the five suspendee types.** Episodic suspendees have the highest participation rate and fighters have the lowest participation rate. Seventy-four percent of the episodic suspendees participated in at least one extracurricular activity at sometime during the last three school years; however, in contrast, only 41 percent of the fighters did the same.

- **Episodic suspendees are the best students and fighters are the worst.** On the average, episodic suspendees have the highest grade point average, 2.13, and fighters have the lowest grade point average, 1.05. In addition, episodic suspendees have the lowest percentage, 10 percent, of students losing credit in courses taken, and fighters have the second highest percentage, 31 percent, of students losing credit. Truants have the highest percentage, 48 percent, of students losing credit.

- **Mobility among the five suspendee types varies greatly.** Truants and fighters are the most mobile groups, and low-achievers are the least mobile of the five suspendee types. For example, nearly 30 percent of the fighters have lived at 4 or more different addresses while attending MCPS while, in contrast, 3 percent of the low-achievers have lived at four or more different addresses.

- **Truants are the oldest group of suspendees, and students-in-crisis, fighters and low-achievers are the youngest.** On the average, truants are 18-years-old, episodic suspendees are 17-years-old, and students-in-crisis, low-achievers, and fighters are 16-years-old.

Exploring the Suspendee Types in Greater Detail

In Chapters 4 through 8 the five suspendee types are explored individually in greater detail. Each chapter presents the following:

1. A narrative description of three suspendees who typify the type being presented.
2. A discussion of characteristics that distinguish that suspendee type from the other four suspendee types.
3. A discussion of special services the suspendee type received to improve school behavior. This discussion is generally limited to services received at the secondary school level; however, when it is possible, help received at the elementary school level is mentioned. The latter is rare since elementary school records generally failed to document specific actions taken to correct suspendee misbehavior.

In addition, when it is appropriate, parent reaction to school help received is discussed (i.e., actions taken by the school to correct misbehaving).[4]

---

4. It was possible to survey by telephone about 37 percent of the parents of multiple suspendees. This low response rate limits the degree to which the results can be generalized to parents of all multiple suspendees and therefore the results are used only to supplement findings that emerged from the review of school data on multiple suspendees. (For a brief discussion of the findings from the parent survey see Appendix B.) In spite of the low response rate, many of the parent survey findings are both positive and encouraging. For example, 65 percent of the parents said the school communicated enough to them about their child's behavior, and 54 percent said they felt they were adequately involved in school decisions on how to discipline their child.

EXHIBIT 6

Background Characteristics For Five Suspendee Types

	SUSPENDEE TYPE					
	Truant	Episodic	Student in Crisis	Low Achiever	Fighter	All Multiple Suspendees
Number	58	49	49	34	29	219
Mean Number of Suspensions	4.02	1.53*	5.73*	3.00	7.86*	4.20
% Suspended for Fighting	30%	39%	34%	31%	35%	34%
% Suspended for Insubordination	47*	39	39	42	45	42
% Suspended for Verbal Abuse	5	12*	7	13*	8	9
% Suspended for Attendance Problems .	7	4	8	3*	5	6
% Suspended for Drug/Alcohol Abuse ..	8*	2	7	3	2	5
% Suspended for Other Behavior Probs.	3	4	5	10*	7	5
% In Head Start	22	10*	10*	24	28*	18
% In Chapter 1.....	16	7	0*	28*	15	12
% In ESOL.....	12	26*	18	21	4*	16
% In Special Education	16	0*	16	48*	15	17
% In Extracurriculars	48	74*	51	68	41*	57
% Attending MCPS 7+ Years	78	65	53*	88	74	71
% From Single Parent Home	60	44	58	45	44	52
% Residing at 4+ Addresses	23	9*	18	3*	28	17
% Minority	60	74	59	77	62	66
% Black	38	25*	33	44	48	36
% Male	62	59	78	77	69	68
% Losing Credit	48*	10*	22	18	31	27
% Repeating a Grade	58	12*	31*	52	56	41
Mean Days Absent (per School Year) ..	21*	8*	15	9*	15	14
Mean Days Absent**	203*	63*	100	82*	138	124
Mean Age	18*	17	16	16	16	17
Mean Family Income (in thousands) ...	$32	$35	$34	$33	$36	$34
CAT Total Grd. 3 (NCE)	47	62*	57	34*	48	48
CAT Total Grd. 5 (NCE)	48	62*	55	38*	49	52
Md. Functional Reading (% Passing) ..	74	92*	65	62	76	74
Md. Functional Math (% Passing)	37	75*	48	27*	41	47
Md. Functional Writing (% Passing) ..	47	77*	40	29*	48	49
Md. Functional Citizenship (% Passing)	28	42	24	21*	17*	28
Grade Point Average	1.21	2.13*	1.46	1.49	1.05*	1.49

* Suspendee type differs statistically from other suspendee types. The percentage reported is either significantly more or less than what should normally be expected, or the number reported is significantly lower or higher than the mean for all multiple suspendees

** Mean calculated across all years while attending MCPS

Chapter 5

THE FIGHTER SUSPENDEE

Fighters are the smallest group of multiple suspendees, making up 13 percent of the total multiple suspendee sample. Fighters are suspendees with a long history of suspensions, mostly for fighting. School records generally described these students as "hot tempered," "incorrigible," "hostile and aggressive." Comments from parents and fighters themselves make it clear that fighting and other disruptive behavior began in the late elementary grades. Consider the following three fighters:

- David is a bright, articulate 8th grader who has fallen in with the wrong crowd. Two of his three best friends at his school also are suspendees. After having been suspended 5 times during the 1985-86 school year, three times for fighting, he was suspended just once during the 1986-87 school year. Two things seem to have helped David: family counseling and a special person--a mentor. The counseling was recommended by the school, and through the school's mentoring program David was matched with a mentor. The mentor is someone who takes a special interest in making sure David lives up to his potential. David says the mentor goes out of his way to make sure David does not get into trouble. David's mentor is also tutoring him in an effort to help David maintain good grades.

- In 1984, John and James transferred into a MCPS junior high school from a Catholic school. Information from the Catholic school appears normal--attendance and grades were better than average. Their first year in MCPS, however, was anything but normal. In their first year in MCPS the two brothers were suspended 13 times, and during the next school year they were suspended 7 more times. Because they were absent so much, both brothers had to repeat grades. Somewhere along the way John and James became involved with the law. Specific details about crimes committed are not known because of the confidential nature of juvenile arrest records. John, however, was arrested and held at the Noyes Children's Center. Their law involvement lead to other problems, constant fighting at school, drug and alcohol abuse and running away from home. MCPS responded by placing both brothers in alternative schools.

- It is difficult to review Joe's school history and not come to the conclusion that he is truly a "troubled kid" who is out of control. When Joe came to school, and that was infrequently, he ended up getting suspended for fighting. Absences from school are somewhat attributable to a hectic home life. In fact, most of Joe's high school years were spent in foster homes. During the 1985-86 school year, the last year Joe would attend a regular MCPS high school, he was suspended 5 times for fighting in a four-month period. Joe's fighting was not limited to students. He frequently would challenge staff. Joe's last day in a regular school was the day he came to school armed with a gun. While serving out this suspension Joe was arrested and is currently institutionalized at Noyes.

Distinguishing Characteristics

Many school officials would argue that the fighter is the type of suspendee who deserves frequent punishment. In many cases, these school officials probably are correct. Many fighters are truly the "bad" and "seriously troubled" kids who, in frustration, strike out at others through aggressive behavior--fighting. But being aggressive is not the only factor that characterizes this suspendee. There are other distinguishing characteristics of fighters:

- o When compared to other suspendee types, a disproportionate number are Black students (nearly 50 percent Black vs. 38 percent White).
- o A disproportionate number of these suspendees enter the juvenile justice system, courts and detention centers.
- o Fighters tend to be more mobile than other suspendee types. Nearly a third have had 4 or more different addresses will enrolled in MCPS.
- o Fighters have the highest suspension rate. The typical fighter has been suspended nearly 8 times compared to 4 times for other suspendees.

PROFILE OF THE FIGHTER SUSPENDEE

Characteristic	Fighters	All Suspendees	All Nonsuspendees
% In Special Education	15%	17%	9%
% In Extracurriculars	41	57	73
% From Single Parent Home	44	52	26
% Losing Credit	31	27	7
% Repeating a Grade	56	41	21
Mean Days Absent (per School Year)	15	14	9
Mean Age	16	17	16
Mean Family Income (in thousands)	$36	$34	$41
% Male	69	68	66
Grade Point Average	1.05	1.49	2.26

Race/Ethnic Group Composition	Asian	Black	White	Hispanic	Total
Number	1	14*	11	3	29
% of Each Race**	3%	48%	38%	10%	100%
% Suspended for Fighting***	0	46*	16	60	34
% Suspended for Insubordination	60	35	58	33	45
% Suspended for Verbal Abuse	0	9	9	0	8
% Suspended for Attendance Problems	0	3	8	0	5
% Suspended for Drug/Alcohol Abuse	0	1	1	7	2
Mean Number of Suspensions	5.0	7.9	9.5	2.7	7.9

* Statistically more than expected

** This percentage should be read as follows--48% of the fighters are Black students.

***This percentage should be read as follows--46% of the suspensions given to Black fighters were for fighting.

It is also essential to discuss two other important characteristics of fighters that emerged from focus groups held with fighters at five schools. Focus groups uncovered the following about fighters: 1) they have poor self-perceptions; and 2) they feel alienated and alone in their schools.

Fighters concede easily with the perception that they are the school's "trouble-maker." A few take pride in this role. Yet, others reject the image. Regardless of whether the suspendee deserves the image or does not deserve it, or whether he accepts or rejects the image, being labeled a "trouble-maker" or "fighter" hurts. Once a student gains this reputation, living it down is sometimes impossible. The reputation can, in the mind of the suspendee, cause further disciplinary troubles. Consider the following statements from fighters:

- "Once you get a bad reputation it sticks with you forever. And the reputation sticks even though I calmed down in 7th and 8th grade."

- "Being with the same people from year to year helps your reputation spread. I was in a fight last year and there was a lot of talk about it. They (school staff) think about fighting when my name is mentioned."

- "I can remember being in a fight at the end of the 8th grade. Me and another student started fighting--I can't even remember over what. When I came in on the first day of school (the next year, 9th grade) the principal called me in and warned me about my behavior. He told me that he didn't want what happened last year to happen again."

- "Three different teachers have come to me (beginning of school year) and warned me about something that happened last year. They talk about kids in meetings, and the word gets around. They told me not to let what happened last year to happen this."

In addition to dealing with the burden of being the school's "trouble-maker," many fighters feel isolated and alone, almost to the point where they feel there is no one in their school to turn to for support. Nearly half of the fighters interviewed reported that there was no one in their school that they could talk to about important things. Fighters also have the lowest participation rate in extracurricular activities, and the second worst school attendance rate.

This feeling of alienation may account for the fact that suspendees frequently associate with other suspendees or other students who have school-wide reputations as "trouble-makers." Thirty percent of the friends named by fighters had been suspended, and 33 percent of the parents said "peers" is the main reason their child misbehaves at school. These findings are supported by the literature on disruptive students that also has found that disruptive students or trouble-makers have friends who are delinquent.[5]

---

5. Zakariya, S. 1987. "Fair, Unfailing Discipline Is the Least Schools Owe to Delinquent Kids." **The American School Board Journal**. 23:29. Also see Gottredson, G. and Daiger, D. 1979. Disruption in Six Hundred Schools Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University.

Special Services and Help Received

Summarized below is a profile of the special services fighters received while enrolled in MCPS.

SERVICES AND HELP RECEIVED: FIGHTERS

Characteristic	Fighters	All Suspendees
% Receiving Home Instruction	3%	6%
% Receiving In-school Counseling	37	30
% Receiving Private Therapy/Counseling	22	14
% In WOC/OJT Program	10	10
% Attending Evening School	3	10
% Attending Alternative School	24	11
% Receiving Special Outside Help*	10	10

*Includes assistance from places such as Rockville Youth Services, Department of Juvenile Services, or private/public hospitals.

It is difficult for schools to ignore fighters. Like students-in-crisis, fighters demand attention, and school records show that specific actions were taken by schools for 55 percent of the fighters. Here is what the data show:

- Thirty-seven percent (37 percent) of the fighters received in-school counseling. This counseling focused on correcting the fighters openly hostile behaviors and attitudes. In addition, 22 percent of the fighters received private counseling away from school in an attempt to accomplish the same thing. This counseling, paid for by parents, was generally started with encouragement from the school.

- Twenty-four percent (24 percent) of the fighters were placed in alternative schools designed specifically to handle the student's disruptive behavior. The following schools are represented--Gateway, Journey, and Tahoma. Among the five suspendee types, fighters have the highest placement rate in alternative schools (24 percent vs. 11 percent).

- Ten percent (10 percent) of the fighters have been placed in a Work Oriented Curriculum (WOC) program.

- Ten percent (10 percent) of the fighters received assistance from an agency outside of MCPS such as counseling provided by one of the regionally-based service centers for delinquent youth.

Chapter 6

THE STUDENT-IN-CRISIS SUSPENDEE

Twenty-two percent of all multiple suspendees are students-in-crisis. Students-in-crisis are suspendees who are having problems adjusting to some stressful crisis in their life. This inability to adjust or cope leads to misbehaving. These suspendees face a variety of such crises as:

- Divorce or separation of parents/custody battle (dysfunctional family)
- Death of parent/sibling
- Serious health problem facing parent or suspendee (heart surgery)
- Abusive parent/alcoholic parent (dysfunctional family)

Consider the following three students-in-crisis:

- Over the past four years, Tom, a 10th grader, has been suspended 10 times. He might have been suspended more if it had not been for the fact that he spent so much time on home instruction. Tom is a bright student. He scores in the 7th or 8th stanines on his achievement tests, and he passed all of the Project Basic Tests. Tom's mother blames his problems on their family situation. She thinks her husband's alcohol problem is the major source of Tom's problems. She even thinks that Tom's involve- ment with drugs is related to this. It is also important to note that one of Tom's older brothers dropped out MCPS while another brother was a multiple suspendee. But Tom's mother is determined to straighten him out, and with her help he was placed in The Other Way (a MCPS alternative school for students with behavioral problems) this past school year.

- When Richard was in the 7th grade he was absent nearly 60 days, and he spent another 10 days out of school serving out the punishments for 4 different suspensions. Over the next two years Richard was suspended 8 times. School staff members believe that Richard's problems center around his father. His father has been consistently uncooperative with the school's effort to help Richard improve (the father refused to allow Richard to be placed in MCPS' Kingsley Wilderness School, an alternative school for seriously disruptive or chronically truant students). Richard lives with his father, but school staff members believe that Richard is really living alone. The father spends most of his time with a girl friend in Frederick leaving Richard on his own.

- This past spring Mark graduated from MCPS. While enrolled in MCPS, he managed to get suspended 9 times during three school years. His mother says MCPS never did enough to correct his misbehaving, most of which she felt began with a fist fight in the 10th grade. She also noted that Mark had a learning disability that, in her opinion, added to his behavioral problems. Mark was placed in a special education program for his learning disability; however, he continued to be suspended from school. While in high school Mark underwent heart surgery twice. Mark seemed to have trouble coping with his illness, and his fighting problems did begin around the same time as his health problems.

Distinguishing Characteristics

Distinguishing characteristics of students-in-crisis are noted below. The chart below summarizes additional information on students-in-crisis.

- Compared to the other suspendee types, a disproportionate number of students-in-crisis are White students (41 percent).
- Compared to the other suspendee types, students-in-crisis have not been enrolled in MCPS as long as other suspendees (53 percent attending MCPS 7+ years vs. 71 percent for all multiple suspendees).
- Compared to the other suspendee types, students-in-crisis are the youngest group of multiple suspendees (16 years vs. 17 years).

PROFILE OF THE STUDENT-IN-CRISIS SUSPENDEE

Characteristic	Students-in-Crisis	All Suspendees	All Nonsuspendees
% In Special Education	16%	17%	9%
% In Extracurriculars	51	57	73
% From Single Parent Home	58	52	26
% Losing Credit	22	27	7
% Repeating a Grade	31	41	21
Mean Days Absent (per School Year)	15	14	9
Mean Age	16	17	16
Mean Family Income (in thousands)	$34	$34	$41
% Male	78	68	66
Grade Point Average	1.46	1.49	2.26

Race/Ethnic Group Composition	Asian	Black	White	Hispanic	Total
Number	4	16	20*	7	49
% Of Each Race**	8%	33%	41%	18%	100%
% Suspended for Fighting***	42	43*	30	25	34
% Suspended for Insubordination	28	28	39	61	39
% Suspended for Verbal Abuse	0	8	10	2	7
% Suspended for Attendance Problems	24	8	9	0	8
% Suspended for Drug/Alcohol Abuse	3	6	10 *	6	7
Mean Number of Suspensions	3.3	6.3	6.8	3.6	5.7

* Statistically more than expected.

** This percentage should be read as follows--8% of the students-in-crises are Asian students.

***This percentage should be read as follows--42% of the suspensions given to Asian students-in-crisis were for fighting.

If it were not for their involvement in a crisis, many in-crisis suspendees could be mistaken for truants (annual mean days absent is second to truants) or fighters (mean number of suspensions is second to fighters). The fact that these suspendees are involved in a serious crisis is without question the single most important factor distinguishing students-in-crisis from all other multiple suspendees. And the fact that the crisis centers around a problem at home cannot be ignored. For many of these suspendees home life greatly influences what happens at school. Observations by school staff seem to confirm the influence the family can have on suspendees:[6]

- "I think all of his problems stem from family problems. If we could get help to these kids during the crisis, it would be better for all."
- "He has a very bad family life. Parents divorced and father in jail."
- "He's left on his own a lot. Mother works extended hours. No father at home and his other brother recently left home."

Regardless of the crisis, the fact is some students in MCPS are not able to cope adequately with stressful situations in their lives. These crises do cause some students to misbehave, and, for many suspendees, these crises turn some students into chronic "malcontents" and "trouble-makers." It is not being suggested that any student facing a crisis at home or at school will turn into a "trouble-maker" because such a statement is not supported by common sense or the literature. For example, the literature points out that six out of seven children of divorced parents are able to cope with that "crisis" without help.[7]

Special Services and Help Provided by Schools

Summarized in the chart on the next page is a profile of special school services students-in-crisis received while enrolled in MCPS.

For school staff, helping students-in-crisis is like walking through a "mine field." There is always the potential that a student or parent could blow-up and go "off the wall" (this has happened). In spite of this, there is an advantage to helping solve the problems of students-in-crisis. The advantage is that it is easy to identify the source or cause of these suspendees' problems. There is no mystery as to why these suspendees misbehave. We easily can put our fingers on the thing that is making life miserable for these suspendees. If the cause of the misery could be eased or eliminated, chances are good that efforts to help these suspendees would succeed.

---

6. Such a relationship is strongly supported in the education literature. See the following article, Myers, D. and others. 1987. "Student Discipline and High School Performance," Sociology of Education. 60:18-33.

7. Cherlin, A. J. 1981. Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage. Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press. Also see, Joseph Alper. 1987. "When Bad Things Happen to Good Kids: How They Recover," The Washington Post. September 1.

SERVICES AND HELP RECEIVED: STUDENTS-IN-CRISIS

Characteristic	Students-in-Crisis	All Suspendees
% Receiving Home Instruction	14%	6%
% Receiving In-school Counseling	31	30
% Receiving Private Therapy/Counseling	29	14
% In WOC/OJT Program	8	10
% Attending Evening School	2	10
% Attending Alternative School	16	11
% Receiving Special Outside Help*	20	10

* Includes assistance from places such as Rockville Youth Services, Department of Juvenile Services, or private/public hospitals.

Helping the student-in-crisis overcome misery is difficult because this frequently means involving those who are the cause of the problem--an abusive and uncooperative parent. Such was the case with Richard (previously discussed). Solving Richard's problems seem impossible with- out doing something about his father. In fact, Richard's school has argued that his problems are beyond their resources, and the only option they have is turning to the courts and Protective Services for help.

Regardless of the difficulties involved, the secondary school records of students-in-crisis reveal a great deal of action taken by schools to correct these suspendees' problems. Seventy-one of these suspendees have had some action taken. Overall, just about half of the other multiple suspendees have had action taken on their behalf to correct misbehaving.

This is how schools helped students-in-crisis:

- Thirty-one percent (31 percent) of the in-crisis suspendees received in-school counseling. The counseling sessions, both individual and group, focused on correcting the poor behavior causing the suspension problems. These sessions, however, also focused on helping the student adjust to specific problems such as the death of a loved one or problems associated with divorce. There really is no typical length of time for these sessions. Some sessions lasted several months and others lasted several school years. Generally, these sessions started around the time the suspendee became increasing difficult to control at school.

- Twenty-nine percent (29 percent) of the in-crisis suspendees received private counseling/therapy. This is twice the rate for all other multiple suspendees (14 percent). The private counseling/therapy is more intense than the counseling received in school. The counseling or therapy sessions are run by highly-trained health professionals (e.g., psychologist or psychiatrist), and many times involve family members. Like the school counseling, the length of time in therapy varies greatly.

- Twenty percent (20 percent) of the in-crisis suspendees received assistance from an agency outside MCPS. The assistance is generally counseling provided by one of the regionally-based service centers for delinquent youth such as the Rockville Youth Services Center. However, some of the assistance is of a totally different nature. For example, through the appropriate county agencies three suspendees were placed in foster homes.

- Sixteen percent (16 percent) of the in-crisis suspendees were placed in an alternative school designed specifically to handle the students' disruptive behaviors. The following schools are represented: The Other Way, Kingsley Wilderness, Phoenix, Gateway, and Whittier.

- Fourteen percent (14 percent) of the in-crisis suspendees received home instruction due to emotional problems. This home instruction placement rate is the highest of any suspendee type. Overall, only 6 percent of the multiple suspendees received home instruction. The high rate of home instruction may reflect the severe nature of these students' problems. In light of how frequently these suspendees come from dysfunctional families, one might question the wisdom and effectiveness of home instruction for in-crisis suspendees.

- Eight percent (8 percent) of the in-crisis suspendees were placed in a Work Oriented Curriculum (WOC) program.

Chapter 7

THE TRUANT SUSPENDEE

Truants are the largest group of multiple suspendees, making up 27 percent of the total multiple suspendee sample. Truant suspendees are students with serious attendance problems. Consider the following truants:

- During a four year period, James, a 10th grader, was suspended 14 times. During the 1983-84 and 1984-85 school years, James was absent 123 days. It is worth noting that since first enrolling in MCPS James and his family have moved six times, and James attended three different elementary schools. In elementary school, James participated in the Chapter 1 Program, and during junior high school he received in-school counseling for his behavioral problems. When James entered 9th grade he was placed in the WOC (Work Oriented Curriculum) program. James' attendance was so bad he lost credit in all his WOC courses as well as in four other courses. James repeated the 9th grade. Once again he participated in the WOC program. This time around, however, there was improvement, especially with James' grades and attendance. James, however, continued to be suspended from school.

- John has attended MCPS since kindergarten, and between kindergarten and the 9th grade he missed 284 school days. On an annual basis, John was absent 26 school days. It is important to point out that John's family has moved six times since he first entered MCPS. Last year John decided to drop out of school. His mother says he lost interest, and he could not get along with teachers. "He was always arguing with them, and getting into trouble." When John's mother was asked about why he missed so much school she could not offer a reasonable explanation. She was convinced that MCPS was the problem, not John nor anything she did.

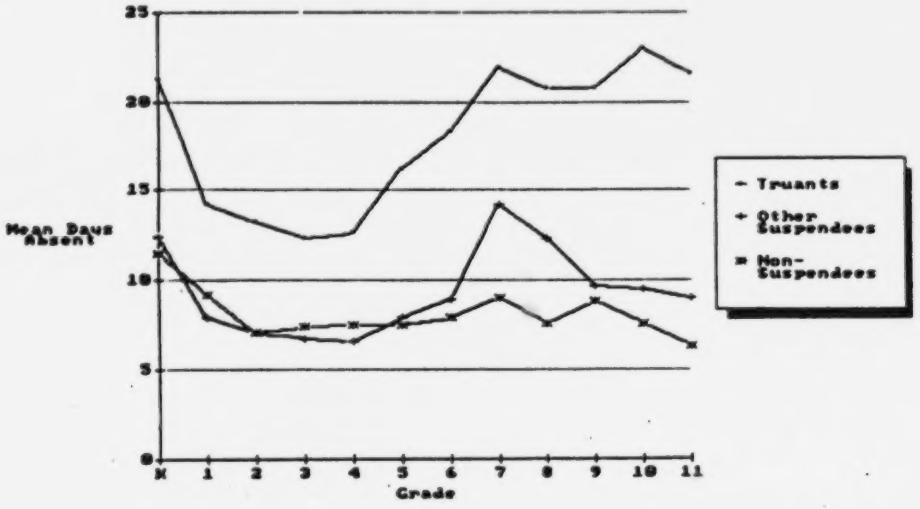
- Most students can handle the transition from elementary school to junior high school, but a few cannot. Janice, a student whose elementary school record was above average in every way, is an example of a student who failed to make the transition. During her first two years in junior high school she was suspended 11 times. Janice was absent so much, 61 days, during the 7th grade that she was required to repeat that grade. Repeating 7th grade helped. The next year Janice went from failing just about everything to getting nearly all B's, and she cut her absences in half. She still got suspended, but overall, suspensions declined. During the 1986-87 school year, Janice managed not to get suspended, and was also a WOC student.

Distinguishing Characteristics

Due to absences alone, the typical truant suspendee has missed more than a year of school by the time he/she reaches the 9th grade. For many truant suspendees poor attendance began in the early elementary grades, generally between kindergarten and 4th grade (see Exhibit 7). The absenteeism rate for truants between kindergarten and 4th grade is nearly twice the rate for other suspendee types and nonsuspendees. Attendance problems intensify for truants between the 5th and 6th grade and worsen again when the truant enters 7th grade.

Attendance problems also worsen for other suspendee types when they enter the 7th grade, but after the 8th grade absenteeism rates for other suspendee types improve significantly. For truant suspendees, however, attendance problems remain constant over the high school years. Such a trend, however, should not be surprising. By the time a truant reaches high school, missing school has become a habit, but truants do not develop this habit on their own. Parents of truants must share some of the blame. Data presented in Exhibit 7 show that for truant suspendees poor attendance starts in kindergarten. But kindergartners do not make conscious decisions to attend school or stay home. These decisions are made by parents. Parents of truant suspendees seem to be making inappropriate decisions for their children. On the other hand, in light of how many truants (60 percent) come from single parent homes, perhaps the notion that truants are left to decide to go to school on their own may not be that unreasonable.

EXHIBIT 7
Mean Absences in Each Grade for Truant Suspendees



Besides having severe attendance problems, truant suspendees have other characteristics that set them apart from the other four suspendee types. A brief summary of those characteristics follows. Additional information on the truant suspendee is summarized in the chart on the next page.

- Nearly half of the truants' suspensions are for insubordination.
- Nearly half of the truant suspendees lose credit in all their course work.
- Chronic absenteeism causes more than half of the truants to repeat at least one grade.
- Compared to other suspendees, truant suspendees are much older students (18 years vs. 17 years).
- A disproportionate number of suspensions for truants are drug related.
- Based on family income, truant suspendees are more likely to come from less affluent homes than are the other suspendee types or nonsuspendees.

PROFILE OF THE TRUANT SUSPENDEE

Characteristic	Truants	All Suspendees	All Nonsuspendees
% In Special Education	16	17	9
% In Extracurriculars	48	57	73
% From Single Parent Home	60	52	26
% Losing Credit	48	27	7
% Repeating a Grade	58%	41%	21%
Mean Days Absent (per School Year)	21	14	9
Mean Age	18	17	16
Mean Family Income (in thousands)	$32	$34	$41
% Male	62	68	66
Grade Point Average	1.21	1.49	2.26

Race/Ethnic Group Composition	Asian	Black	White	Hispanic	Total
Number	3	22	23*	20	58
% of Each Race**	5%	38%	40%	17%	100%
% Suspended for Fighting***	22	43*	21	23	30
% Suspended for Insubordination	78	38	49	52	47
% Suspended for Verbal Abuse	0	7	6	0	5
% Suspended for Attendance Problems	0	7	22	0	7
% Suspended for Drug/Alcohol Abuse	0	1	11*	20	8
Mean Number of Suspensions	2.0	4.7	4.4	2.3	4.0

* Statistically more than expected.
** This percentage should be read as follows--40% of the truant suspendees are White students.
***This percentage should be read as follows--21% of the suspensions given to White truants were for fighting.

Truant suspendees have another characteristic that is worth noting. When compared to other multiple suspendees and nonsuspendees, truant suspendees tend to be more mobile. Typically, 23 percent of all truant suspendees, 17 percent of all multiple suspendees, and 7 percent of all nonsuspendees have moved 4 or more times while enrolled in MCPS. Being mobile creates a number of problems for truants. First, it inhibits the likelihood that a stable home/school relationship will develop. This may explain why nearly a third of truants' parents say they are <u>in conflict with the school</u> over how to resolve their child's discipline problems. This conflict between the school and parents over how to punish may explain why some suspendees misbehavior is not corrected simply through the act of being suspended. It is important to point out that being in conflict does not mean parents are not involved in the discipline process. In fact, parent survey data show a high level of parental involvement. Nearly 60 percent of the truant parents said the school involved them when their child was disciplined. Thus being in conflict with a school does not stem from a lack of involvement; however, conflict may come about as a result of moving a lot (high mobility).

Second, indirectly, mobility may contribute to suspendees developing into students who are uncaring about school (truants have the second lowest extracurricular activity participation rate of the five suspendee types). In fact, when asked to comment on the behavior of a truant suspendee one teacher said, "He has no connections emotionally at school. It's easy to be disrespectful and insubordinate when you don't care about school."

Special Services and Help Provided by Schools

Summarized below is a profile of special school services truants received while enrolled in MCPS.

SERVICES AND HELP RECEIVED: TRUANTS

Characteristic	Truants	All Suspendees
% Receiving Home Instruction	5%	6%
% Receiving In-school Counseling	35	30
% Receiving Private Therapy/Counseling ...	11	14
% In WOC/OJT Program	19	10
% Attending Evening School	9	10
% Attending Alternative School	12	11
% Receiving Special Outside Help*	10	10

*Includes assistance from places such as Rockville Youth Services, Department of Juvenile Services, or private/public hospitals.

Data presented in Exhibit 7 make it clear that for many truant suspendees severe attendance problems begin very early in the elementary grades. An important question should then be, "What was done by the schools to alter this behavior?" Reviews of truants' elementary school records did not reveal any specific actions taken to correct or improve the school attendance of truants.

It would be unfair, however, to give the impression that elementary schools do nothing for truants despite this lack of documentation in student records. Schools do intervene actively when students are truant. Perhaps understanding more about truancy in general at the elementary school level may explain why the review of school records failed to reveal any specific actions taken by schools. Consider the following:

- Overall, chronic absenteeism is not a serious problem at the elementary school level. As a rule elementary schools have few truants. In fact, at the elementary school level, less than one percent of the students in any given grade could be labeled truant.

- In light of the small numbers of truants, elementary schools have the time to deal with the problems of truants on an individual and informal basis. It is rare for the elementary school to involve outside resources or formal programs in dealing with truancy. The informal method used by elementary schools may explain why record reviews failed to show any specific actions taken by schools.

- The academic consequences of truancy at the elementary school are not as severe as those imposed at the secondary school level. For example, elementary school students do not lose credit in subjects. This eases the pressure to do anything about truancy through formalized programs.

- Findings from this study show that truants tend to be mobile. The opportunity any school may have to alter the attendance behavior of truants is lessened by the truant's relatively frequent moves.

About half (48 percent) of the truant suspendees' secondary school records revealed specific actions taken by the school to correct misbehaving. Nothing, however, is noted about the effectiveness of these actions. But, based on data presented in Exhibit 7 that shows absenteeism as a constant problem across all grades, one might argue that these actions have not corrected the behavior of truants. It is obvious that these actions have not altered the attendance pattern of the truants investigated in this study.

One logical explanation for the failure to alter attendance habits might be the fact that the actions taken by schools generally do not attempt to instill in the truant a sense of "school ownership." In fact, one might argue that, with the exception of counseling the actions discussed below, do just the opposite. Instead of creating and encouraging pride and ownership in the school, most actions taken by schools attempt to lessen school contacts (for example, the WOC program requires vast amounts of time spent outside the school and alternative schools completely remove the truant from his/her home school).

Here's what the data[8] show:

- Thirty-five percent (35 percent) of the truant suspendees have received in-school counseling, typically from the guidance department, to help correct the problem associated with chronic truancy. These counseling sessions also focus on correcting the poor behavior that is causing the truants' suspension problems. There really is no typical length of time for these sessions. Some sessions lasted several months and others lasted several school years. There also is no consistent pattern for when counseling begins. For some truants, counseling began in the early junior high school grades (grades 7 and 8) and for others it may have started in high school (grades 9 or 10).

- Nineteen percent (19 percent) of the truant suspendees have been placed in a Work Oriented Curriculum (WOC) program. The WOC program combines the teaching of basic skills with on-the-job experience. According to MCPS' Department of Career and Vocational Education, the office that coordinates the WOC program, the program appeals to students who may be at risk of dropping out of school. Assuming truants will drop out of school is realistic. In fact, to date, 4 of the 58 sample truant suspendees (7 percent) have dropped out of school officially.

---

8. The percentage reported may add to more than 100 percent since suspendees may have participated in several different programs.

- Twelve percent (12 percent) of the truant suspendees have been placed in an alternative school designed with the truant suspendee in mind. The following schools are represented: Gateway, Tahoma, Whittier, Kingsley Wilderness, Quest, and Journey.

- Eleven percent (11 percent) of the truant suspendees are receiving private counseling/therapy. This counseling or therapy is much more intense in the sense that the therapy sessions are run by highly trained health professionals (psychologist or psychiatrist) than the counseling received in school. The private sessions occasionally involve family members (e.g., family counseling). Like school counseling, the length of time in therapy varies greatly. A few of the truants have been attending therapy sessions for more than two years while others attended therapy sessions only a few times.

- Ten percent (10 percent) of the truant suspendees are receiving assistance from an agency outside MCPS. The assistance is generally counseling and is most frequently provided by one of the regionally-based service centers for delinquent youth such as the Rockville Youth Services Center.

- Nine percent (9 percent) of the truant suspendees are enrolled in classes at evening school. Evening school is operated by MCPS' Department of Adult Education. Evening school affords many truant suspendees the opportunity to repeat course work in that they previously failed or lost credit. It probably is safe to assume that if it were not for Evening School many of these truant suspendees would drop out of school completely.

- Five percent (5 percent) of the truant suspendees have received home instruction due to emotional problems. Home instruction is supposed to be limited to 60 consecutive school calendar days; however, it was typical for many of the truant suspendees to have received home instruction for longer periods of time.

Chapter 8

THE LOW-ACHIEVING SUSPENDEE

Sixteen percent of all multiple suspendees are students with academic learning problems. For these suspendees, poor school performance causes misbehaving. Consider the following low-achievers:

- Craig always has attended school in MCPS, and since his Head Start days he has lived at the same address with his mother. For Craig coming to school was never a problem. Craig's problems were academic. He struggled through the lower grades, and like most low-achievers he repeated a grade. Craig's achievement test scores have been consistently in the 3rd and 4th stanines, and to date he has passed only one of the Project Basic Tests. When Craig entered the 7th grade, life at school changed noticeably. Craig became a discipline problem, earning 12 out-of-school suspensions (most for fighting and insubordination) in two years. His behavior got so out of hand in the 8th grade that he was forced to spend a month on home instruction. When he returned, he was placed in a resource room for his academic learning problems. Craig spent the entire 9th grade in a resource room, never earning another suspension.

- The only negative thing in Tom's school record is his poor academic performance. If it were not for this, it might be hard to figure out why Tom was suspended three times from junior high school. With the exception of his grades and test scores, both of which are very poor (poor enough to have him spend nearly all of elementary school in a resource room for the learning disabled), Tom's school record looks good. He has missed only 20 days of school since the 1st grade. He is active in school, participating in extracurricular activities on a regular basis. And there is nothing in his school record to suggest that he is a discipline problem. Perhaps it was these favorable characteristics that Tom used to overcome his suspension problems. Since his last suspension, Tom has gone two years without another suspension.

- During the 7th and 8th grades, Chris was suspended 10 times from school, mostly for insubordination. In spite of his discipline problems, Chris managed to earn mostly C's and B's, and his school attendance was good. Some might say that the grades Chris earned were better than expected. His achievement test scores were as low as possible. For example, his California Achievement Test scores on the reading subtest were at the bottom stanine. Chris's suspension problems, however, ended when he entered the 9th grade. The help Chris received from his parents seemed to end Chris's discipline problems. Beginning in the 4th grade and ending in the 8th grade, Chris's parents paid for Chris to receive private counseling/therapy. The counseling focused on two issues, Chris's hyperactivity and his social-emotional problems. In addition, the entire family was involved in group family counseling. For Chris, the additional support worked.

Distinguishing Characteristics

Here are some of the distinguishing characteristics of low-achievers:

- Compared to other multiple suspendees, a disproportionate number have been labeled learning disabled (48 percent vs. 17 percent).
- The majority of low-achievers have achievement test scores below the 4th stanine.
- Compared to other multiple suspendees, a disproportionate number are suspended for verbal abuse (13 percent vs. 9 percent).
- Compared to the other four suspendee types, a disproportionate number of low-achieving suspendees are Black students (44 percent vs. 36 percent).

PROFILE OF THE LOW-ACHIEVING SUSPENDEE

Characteristic	Low-Achievers	All Suspendees	All Nonsuspendees
% In Special Education	48%	17%	9%
% In Extracurriculars	68	57	73
% From Single Parent Home	45	52	26
% Losing Credit	18	27	7
% Repeating a Grade	52	41	21
Mean Days Absent (per School Year)	9	14	9
Mean Age	16	17	16
Mean Family Income (in thousands)	$33	$34	$41
% Male	77	68	66
Grade Point Average	1.49	1.49	2.26

Race/Ethnic Group Composition	Asian	Black	White	Hispanic	Total
Number	3	15*	8	8	34
% Of Each Race**	9%	44%	24%	24%	100%
% Suspended for Fighting***	50	27*	34	28	31
% Suspended for Insubordination	33	44	34	47	42
% Suspended for Verbal Abuse	0	21*	14	3	13
% Suspended for Attendance Problems	0	0	7	5	3
% Suspended for Drug/Alcohol Abuse	0	2	0	6	2
Mean Number of Suspensions	1.3	3.1	4.0	2.5	3.0

* Statistically more than expected.
** This percentage should be read as follows--44% of the low-achieving suspendees are Black students.
***This percentage should be read as follows--27% of the suspensions given to Black low-achievers were for fighting.

It is important to emphasize that for the low-achiever poor school perform- ance does cause misbehaving. This particular relationship is supported in the educational literature. Myers and recently others noted in a study on student discipline and high school performance that poor school performance can cause misbehaving. They concluded the following:

> Our findings suggest that academic performance and family situation play an important role in determining student misbehavior. The results suggest that failure in school as measured by grades and math achievement influence later misbehavior.[9]

This study also concluded that the relationships between grades and misbehaving go in both directions. Poor academic performance causes misbehavior, but misbehavior also causes poor academic performance. Both relationships make sense, and both are supported with the findings from this study. The episodic suspendee shows how logical it is that misbehavior can cause poor academic performance, and the low-achieving suspendee proves the logic of the other relationship--poor grades cause misbehaving.

Special Services and Help Provided by Schools

Summarized below is a profile of special school services low-achievers received while enrolled in MCPS.

SERVICES AND HELP RECEIVED: LOW-ACHIEVERS

Characteristic	Low-Achievers	All Suspendees
% Receiving Home Instruction	6%	6%
% Receiving In-school Counseling	48	30
% Receiving Private Therapy/Counseling ...	3	14
% In WOC/OJT Program	9	10
% Attending Evening School	9	10
% Attending Alternative School	0	11
% Receiving Special Outside Help*	0	10

* Includes assistance from places such as Rockville Youth Services, Department of Juvenile Services, or private/public hospitals.

Forty-one percent of the low-achievers' secondary school records revealed specific actions taken by the school to correct misbehaving. Overall, the data for low-achievers, when compared to the other suspendee types (with the exception of episodic suspendees), fail to show a wide-range of actions taken to correct misbehaving. For example, no low-achievers have been placed in an alternative

9. Myers, D. and others. 1987. "Student Discipline and High School Performance," Sociology of Education. 60:18-33.

school, and receiving private therapy (away from the school) is practically non-existent. Only 3 percent of the low-achievers received private therapy compared to 14 percent for all multiple suspendees. Here's what the specific data show:

- Nearly half (48 percent) of the low-achievers received in-school counseling. These counseling sessions focused on correcting the problems that cause misbehavior. Some sessions lasted several months and others lasted several school years.

- Nine percent (9 percent) of the low-achievers have been placed in a Work Oriented Curriculum (WOC) program.

- Nine percent (9 percent) of the low-achievers withdrew from their home school to attend evening school.

There are several good reasons to explain why low-achievers have not received a lot of structured assistance to correct their discipline problems. For one thing, low-achievers, with the exception of episodic suspendees, do not get suspended a lot. The typical multiple suspendee gets suspended about 4 times compared to 3 times for the typical low-achiever. The low-achiever may not be as self-correcting as the episodic suspendee, but low-achievers do have a lot of positive qualities. These qualities may help low-achievers get back on the right track without a lot of special help. Consider the following:

- Compared to the other suspendee types, low-achievers have the second highest extracurricular activity participation rate. Overall, 57 percent of the multiple suspendees participated in an activity during the last three years; however, 70 percent of the low-achievers did the same.

- Low-achievers have the second lowest percentage of students losing credit in courses taken. Low-achievers also have the second best school attendance rate. In fact, low-achievers come to school as frequently as do nonsuspendees.

- Low-achievers also are less mobile than other suspendee types. Nearly 90 percent of the low-achievers have attended a MCPS school for 7 or more years, and only 3 percent of these suspendees have resided at 4 or more different addresses while attending MCPS. Overall, nearly 20 percent of the multiple suspendees have resided at 4 or more different addresses, and 70 percent have attended MCPS for 7 or more years.

- The assistance low-achievers receive through placements in special education programs may influence or alter their behavior in a positive way. Compared to other suspendees, low-achievers have the highest special education placement (48 percent vs. 17 percent). The resources that are devoted to correcting the low-achievers' learning disabilities may help correct the suspendees' misbehavior. Many low-achievers are placed in resource rooms and secondary learning centers. By their design, these programs have more direct supervision of students than one would find in the normal secondary classroom. This close super- vision of students probably has a positive impact on the behavior of students who have had previous behavioral problems.

Chapter 9

THE EPISODIC SUSPENDEE

Twenty-two percent of all multiple suspendees are episodic suspendees. These are students with no history of poor school behavior. Consider the following episodic suspendees:

- During two months while in the 8th grade, Donny was suspended five times, spending 8 days at home for carrying a dangerous weapon, classroom disruption, and insubordination. Prior to these incidents Donny had never been suspended. And, after these two months of "raising hell" had passed, Donny settled down and was not suspended again. It is important to mention that Donny's school records show no other problems. In fact, Donny is an above average student who has participated in programs for the gifted at every school level.

- When Tom's family first moved to the U.S. from India, he spent his first two years of schooling in a private school in Montgomery County. At the start of the 8th grade, Tom transferred into MCPS. Tom's first year in MCPS was hectic. While he came to school everyday, he was caught frequently cutting classes, and he was suspended twice within two months for fighting. Tom ended his first year in MCPS with failures in six different subjects. Tom's school acted quickly, placing him in the Quest Summer Program thus making it possible for him to make up most of his 8th grade failures. Tom adjusted better to the 9th grade. No suspensions or other behavioral problems were recorded by his school, and his grades were better than average. Tom's parents did, however, transfer him back into a private school for the 10th grade.

- Alice is an above average student who has consistently scored at the 9th stanine on achievement tests and since elementary school has participated in gifted and talented programs at nearly every grade. Her school attendance is excellent, her grades are practically all A's and B's, and she is involved in school life, having participated actively in extracurricular activities. Alice, however, is not perfect, and for her the 9th grade was rough. She failed an honors math course, and she began to cut classes. Her problems climaxed with two suspensions in two months, one for verbally abusing a teacher and the other for disrespecting a teacher. Alice's poor behavior ceased as quickly as it started, and once again she is excelling academically and staying out of trouble.

Distinguishing Characteristics

Nearly all the data on episodic suspendees give the impression that these suspendees are normal students going through a "bad period." These suspendees have no prior histories of being maladjusted, nor does poor behavior persist after their temporary bouts with suspension. In short, the episodic suspendee might get suspended three different times during a two month period, but that is the only time this student is involved with suspensions.

But, never getting suspended again does not appear to be a matter of luck for the episodic suspendee. The characteristics that distinguish the episodic suspendee from other suspendees are the same ones that enable this suspendee to bounce back. Here are some of the distinguishing characteristics:

- Compared to other multiple suspendees, nearly all episodic suspendees have average or above average test scores.
- No episodic suspendee has received special education services.
- Compared to the other suspendee types, a disproportionate number of episodic suspendees are female (41 percent vs. 32 percent).
- Among all suspendee types, episodic suspendees have the highest extracurricular activity participation rate (74 percent vs. 57 percent).

PROFILE OF THE EPISODIC SUSPENDEE

Characteristic	Episodics	All Suspendees	All Nonsuspendees
% In Special Education	0%	17%	9%
% In Extracurriculars	74	57	73
% From Single Parent Home	44	52	26
% Losing Credit	10	27	7
% Repeating a Grade	12	41	21
Mean Days Absent (per School Year)	8	14	9
Mean Age	17	17	16
Mean Family Income (in thousands)	$35	$34	$41
% Male	59	68	66
Grade Point Average	2.13	1.4°	2.26

Race/Ethnic Group Composition	Asian	Black	White	Hispanic	Total
Number	14*	12	13	10	49
% Of Each Race**	29%	25%	27%	20%	100%
% Suspended for Fighting***	62	42	21	27	39
% Suspended for Insubordination	23	41	40	55	39
% Suspended for Verbal Abuse	0	8	28*	12	12
% Suspended for Attendance Problems	12	0	2	0	4
% Suspended for Drug/Alcohol Abuse	0	0	9*	0	2
Mean Number of Suspensions	1.4	1.2	1.9	1.6	1.5

* Statistically more than expected.
** This percentage should be read as follows--29% of the episodic suspendees are Asian students.
***This percentage should be read as follows--62% of the suspensions given to Asian episodic suspendees were for fighting.

Special Services and Help Provided by Schools

Summarized below is a profile of special school services episodic suspendees received while enrolled in MCPS.

SERVICES AND HELP RECEIVED: EPISODICS

Characteristic	Episodics	All Suspendees
% Receiving Home Instruction	0%	6%
% Receiving In-school Counseling	5	30
% Receiving Private Therapy/Counseling	7	14
% In WOC/OJT Program	0	10
% Attending Evening School	2	10
% Attending Alternative School	2	11
% Receiving Special Outside Help*	4	10

* Includes assistance from places such as Rockville Youth Services, Department of Juvenile Services, or private/public hospitals.

Data from school records of episodic suspendees show that MCPS has provided very little help in response to these students' behavioral problems. Sixteen percent of these suspendees' school records revealed specific actions taken by the school to correct misbehaving. For example, only a few students participated in counseling or were placed in special programs such as an alternative school. But the lack of help provided to these students does not mean that schools have ignored these students' problems. Instead, the lack of help reinforces the point made earlier--episodic suspendees are normal kids who are well-adjusted and capable of correcting their negative behaviors without special help.

Chapter 10

CONCLUSIONS

This year-long study of students suspended numerous times reveals a number of significant findings that help us to better understand why students misbehave in MCPS secondary schools. First, it is very important to emphasize the point that multiple suspendees represent a very small group of secondary students. Overall, MCPS students getting suspended multiple times during four consecutive school years (1982-83 through 1985-86) represent only 2 percent of all students in grades 7-12. Five percent of the students in these grades were suspended one time only. The remaining 93 percent were never suspended from school. While differences do exist by racial/ethnic group--Blacks are twice as likely as any other group to receive multiple suspensions--the absolute numbers are not in any case very large. If the number of multiple suspendees systemwide were evenly divided by the 40 MCPS secondary schools, there would be no more than 25 students per school building.

Second, the study has shown that multiple suspendees differ noticeably from students who either do not get suspended or who get suspended only once. Some of the areas of difference are participation in extracurricular activities, placement in special education programs, course grades, and school attendance. In all of these areas, as well as others, nonsuspendees and students suspended once out-participate and out-perform multiple suspendees.

Third, the study's analysis of multiple suspendees shows that all multiple suspendees are not alike. Distinct suspendee types exist, and while some low-achievers become suspension problems, data show that low-achievers are clearly not the only students who wind up in trouble. Using the education literature, school histories of multiple suspendees, and supporting information from suspendees, parents and school staff, five suspendee types emerged:

- **Fighter suspendees**, students with a long history of suspensions, most for fighting and other aggressive actions. Fighters make up 13 percent of the multiple suspendee sample.

- **Student-in-crisis suspendees**, students unable to adjust to a short or long term crisis (e.g., family crisis--divorce or an abusive parent, a traumatic move experienced by an ESOL student new to the USA, or personal problems such as drug addiction). Students-in-crisis make up 22 percent of the multiple suspendee sample.

- **Truant suspendees**, students with serious attendance/truancy problems. Truants make up 27 percent of the multiple suspendee sample.

- **Low-achiever suspendees**, students with a history of academic learning problems. Many of the these suspendees have been placed in a special education program for a specific learning disability. Low-achievers make up 16 percent of the multiple suspendee sample.

- **Episodic suspendees**, students whose school records show no unusual problems--no truancy, no class cutting, no learning problems. Episodic suspendees make up 22 percent of the multiple suspendee sample.

The five suspendee types differ noticeably from one another. Some of the areas of difference are the nature and number of suspensions (e.g., on the average, fighters have been suspended 8 times while truants have been suspended 4 times), participation in special MCPS programs (e.g., 48 percent of the low-achievers have been placed in a special education program while in comparison no episodic suspendees have been placed in such a program or received such service), family mobility, and course grades. Many of these differences help explain the behavior of the five suspendee types. For example, the fact that truants were mobile students (i.e., lived at many different addresses) during their elementary school years helps explain to some degree why it was possible for these suspendees to develop into chronic truants in spite of the fact that the vast majority of the truants spent nearly all of their elementary school years in MCPS.

Fourth, data support the contention that becoming a multiple suspendee is associated with certain events or characteristics (student and family) and, with the exception of the episodic suspendee, predicting who will become a fighter, a truant, a low-achiever, or a student-in-crisis is possible. We are unable to predict who will become an episodic suspendee because the behavior of this student has no distinct pattern. However, the behavior of the other four suspendee types is more predictable. Exhibit 8 summarizes the events and factors that are associated with each suspendee type.

Finally, analysis shows that MCPS has experienced different levels of success when attempting to correct the misbehaving of the five suspendee types. Overall, about half of the multiple suspendees' records document a specific action taken by a school to correct misbehaving. This finding, however, vary with the type of suspendee. For example, 71 percent of the students-in-crisis had a specific action taken to correct misbehaving, and 55 percent of the fighters had an action taken to correct their problems. The most common action taken was to arrange for the suspendee to receive counseling. The type of counseling ranged from drop-in visits to the school guidance counselor to weekly therapy sessions with a psychologist. Schools also favored assigning suspendees to alternative schools/programs such as The Other Way, Kingsley Wilderness, or Gateway or to the Work Oriented Curriculum Program.

While in many cases these interventions were successful, in others they failed to change significantly the student's behavior. We cannot say definitively why some interventions failed, but our analysis strongly suggests that two factors play a major role: 1) the intervention is sometimes too late or; 2) the intervention is not well matched to the problem of the suspendee.

1. Intervention Too Late. Records show that in many situations efforts to assist suspendees do not come soon enough. This problem is especially true for the truant suspendee. Most truants have a long history of documented attendance problems beginning in the elementary grades. Records failed to uncover, however, specific actions taken to correct these problems. Many truants attendance problems were not addressed formally until the student started junior high school. By then, a pattern of truancy and concomitant dysfunctional behaviors may be firmly established.

The issue of when help arrives and how it is received has a great deal to do with the involvement of parents. The school cannot address the problem alone. The fact that many truants develop poor attendance habits in the early elementary grades is clearly a problem that parents are, and must, be involved with. MCPS, however, needs to seek better ways to address this problem. Parent involvement techniques currently used by the Head Start program also might work with the parents of truants. These interventions come early and they make the parent responsible for the development of healthy school habits.

EXHIBIT 8
Factors/Events That Can be Used to Predict Types

Suspendee Type	Characteristic or Factor Associated With Type
Fighter	o involved in a serious fight early in junior high years o contact with the juvenile justice system o highly mobile family (mobility within county) o poor academic performance (low grades) o little involvement in school life o close friendships with other disruptive students o perceives self as "school trouble-maker" o feels isolated and alone at school
In-Crisis	o involvement in a serious family crisis/trauma o recently enrolled MCPS (new to system) o family headed by single parent o slightly younger than classmates o drug or alcohol abuse
Truant	o pattern of poor school attendance, starting in early elementary grades o drug or alcohol abuse o family headed by single parent o highly mobile family (mobility within county) o may come from low-income family
Low-Achiever	o consistently poor academic performance o may be learning disabled o likely Head Start or Chapter 1 participant o may come from low-income family o low California Achievement Test scores (3rd stanine or below)

2. **Intervention Not Matching The Problem.** Records show that, in many situations, help offered to suspendees did not match the needs of the suspendee. The mismatch occurs as the result of 1) not getting help to suspendees early when the help is most needed and 2) not understanding the problems facing a suspendee (e.g., a student living with an abusive parent). Take the case of Wendy, a suspendee introduced on page 1. To overcome her truancy problem Wendy was placed in a WOC program. This vocational program is designed for students who are potential dropouts and are disadvantaged economically or academically. Wendy was a potential dropout but she was not disadvantaged. In fact, a review of her records shows a very smart student who happened to be suffering from a very poor family situation (i.e., custody battle). But, by the time the dust settled at home the only option the school had for Wendy was WOC. Getting Wendy to come to school, even it meant coming as a WOC student, was viewed as a victory. But was it a good victory or the best victory?

Schools seem to have recognized the need to try new things with students who misbehave repeatedly. A variety of efforts were uncovered aimed precisely at dealing innovatively with these students' problems. While we did not evaluate the effectiveness of these practices, informal data available on these programs show that these programs do hold promise. Brief descriptions of some of these promising practices follow.

- **Attendance Contracts.** Gaithersburg and Montgomery Blair High Schools are two schools using attendance contracts to improve student attendance.

- **Parent Involvement Programs.** The Kennedy High School cluster is having success in reducing suspensions through a parent involvement program. During the 1986-87 school year, Kennedy High School used a mini-grant to established a parent involvement program called Project REACH (Reaching Educational Achievement through Community Help). Kennedy's suspension rate fell from 4.4 percent to 2.9 percent during the 1986-87 school year.

- **Programs for Truants** Two examples of successful school-based programs, both designed with truancy in mind, are the "Getting Ourselves Together" (GOT) program at Gaithersburg Junior High School and the "Changing Habits to Offer Individual Choices in Education" (CHOICE) program at Parkland Junior High School. Both of these programs achieve success by offering the "at-risk" student a unique personalized academic program within the regular school. During the first year, the suspension rate for GOT participants dropped 82 percent when compared to their suspension rate the year before.

- **School Leadership Teams.** Several secondary schools are trying a unique intervention program with "trouble-makers." These schools are taking regular student government leaders and "trouble-makers" with leadership potential on a 3-day retreat and teaching them leadership skills. The assumption is that once the "trouble-maker" is shown how

to use his/her skills in the proper way, misbehaving will decline. The impact of this program is not known. But it is known that students who are involved in school through extracurricular activities are less likely to misbehave and be suspended from school than are students who are not involved.

- **The Mentor/SAGE (Serving As Guides in Education) Program**. Currently, 13 schools are using the Mentor/SAGE program developed by the Department of Quality Integrated Education to reduce the suspensions of minority students. The impact of this program is not known at this time. However, several schools that are using the program have witnessed large declines in the number of students suspended. For example, at Eastern Intermediate School the overall suspension rate dropped from 9.1 to 1.9 in one year.

Chapter 11

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate the need for us to treat suspendees or "discipline problems" differently. Not all suspendees are alike, and some of the stereotypic views we hold about suspendees simply are not true. For example, not all suspendees are low-achievers or students with academic problems. Nor are all suspendees hostile and aggressive. Students misbehave for different reasons. Changing their behavior will require different solutions.

During the last several school years MCPS has made great strides in reducing the use of suspensions for disciplining students in its schools. Overall suspension rates have dropped; findings from this study show that MCPS does a very good job of helping certain multiple suspendees, particularly students-in-crisis and low-achievers. In spite of the progress of the past several years, there is more work to be done. Of special concern are truants and fighters (40 percent of the multiple suspendee population), as they are the students with whom MCPS has had the least amount of success. Truants and fighters, however, can be helped and based on our findings we suggest the following actions:

- **Earlier Intervention in the Elementary Schools.** For some suspendees such as truants, when the school intervenes to correct behavior it is important as to just what is done when the school intervenes. Study findings for truants show that typically very little is done formally for these students prior to junior high school. Breaking the truant's bad attendance habits has to come early and at a period of time when the bad habits are developing. The data show that most truants begin to consistently miss school at a very early age; some have established bad attendance habits by the end of kindergarten.

  Currently, monthly computerized reports for every school listing students who have been absent 25 percent of the time are distributed to Pupil Personnel Workers (PPW's) in each area office. These reports are useful because they help PPW's identify truants; similar reports would also be useful in the schools which now are left on their own to keep track of truants. In addition, the reports might be modified to highlight students with a previous pattern of poor attendance. What to do once a student is identified remains an important issue. We do not know the answer, but our findings suggest that some kind of intervention involving both the child and the family is needed. One tool that might be useful, and has met with success at the secondary level, is the attendance contract. Elementary schools could consider such contracts with the parents of truants. Another tool is the parenting programs used by Head Start and Chapter 1. These programs have a very strong emphasis on teaching parenting skills, and forming school/parent partnerships that benefit the student.

  Early intervention also is highly recommended for fighters. Findings tell us that many fighters' troubles started after being involved in a serious fight in the early junior high years. Some fights do lead to

other fights. Schools should use this knowledge to prevent further troubles from developing. This would be an ideal time for the school to lessen the impact of that fight through some type of mandatory counseling or aggressive crisis intervention (see discussion below).

- **Establish More Support Groups.** Support groups run by guidance counselors, or operated with the assistance of peer counselors, have been growing in popularity in MCPS schools for some time now (e.g., the Peer Counseling Program at Paint Branch High School). Many of these groups aggressively seek out students who are experiencing a crisis in their lives. For example, West Middle School and Pyle Intermediate School counselors aggressively seek out students experiencing an unexpected death in the family, and through weekly group counseling sessions, support the student through an ordeal that possibly could cause the student to either misbehave or fall behind academically in school. In short, these schools have taken specific steps and actions to "prevent" students from misbehaving. Expanding these efforts to more schools, under the supervision of the Guidance Unit, is highly recommended.

  There is no reason why similar support groups could not be expanded or modified to handle fighters. A student involved in a first-time fight might be prevented from fighting again with the right kind of support. In addition to suspending the student, the suspendee should be required to participate in a support group made up other fighters and potential fighters. The support group's intention would be to help these students develop means of settling differences other than fighting. Support groups can operate effectively in schools, and they currently do, without a great deal of cost or direct supervision from school staff.

- **More Cooperation Between MCPS and County Agencies.** Currently, PPW's meet informally with staff from key county agencies to discuss solutions to the problems facing truants. Informal solutions are suggested and tried, and if they fail to alter behavior, county agencies become involved formally. The informal discussions are not mandatory. Perhaps a more effective way to alleviate the problems of truants and in some situations fighters, especially those involved with a law enforcement agency, is to incorporate the current informalities into a more formal process. We do not need a new level of bureaucracy, but we do need the establishment of a more formal commitment to work together to solve the problems. MCPS can not solve the problem of truancy on its own. Cooperation and support from agencies such as Juvenile Services Administration and the Maryland Department of Social Services are required. The cooperation of the parties involved simply has to be more formal than it is currently.

- **Establish More Specialized School-Based Programs.** Previously highlighted were several programs that individual schools had established on their own for truants. The support of more programs of

this nature is needed and highly recommended. These programs might also include variations on the Mentor/Sage Program.

Finally, we must realize that suspending students from school does not work for all students, and in some situations the suspension is really a very poor and even counterproductive option. It is not logical to suspend a truant from school for not coming to school or cutting classes. Other methods are needed to handle these students, preferably methods that will instill in the student the desire and motivation to come to school and go to classes.

APPENDIX A
THE MCPS SUSPENSION PROJECT

During the 1985-86 school year, the Superintendent of Schools initiated a number of activities aimed at reducing the use of student suspensions. These included intensive monitoring of the monthly suspension statistics and a review of the literature on programs adopted elsewhere to reduce suspension rates. In addition, the superintendent appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on Student Suspensions, made up of community representatives and MCPS staff, whose charge was to provide recommendations regarding critical issues to be explored and ways in which these issues should be addressed.

This committee recommended that MCPS take a comprehensive look at issues related to suspensions, and using a series of interrelated activities, seek ways of better preventing and handling discipline problems in MCPS. Specifically, the committee recommended the implementation of a project called **THE MCPS SUSPENSION PROJECT** designed to address four areas:

I. **The circumstances in which disciplinary actions occur.** Of particular interest are the specific events surrounding referrals for discipline and suspension incidents, including the type of infraction, the time of day, the location, and the activity in which the student was involved. This activity is designed with the intent of providing schools with a tool to better manage information on suspensions. **TIME FRAME**: Pilot-testing, 1985-86 and 1986-87 school years.

II. **The elementary school experience and school histories of students suspended at the secondary school level.** Critical, here are two related concerns: 1) Whether early indicators can be identified that predict later behavior problems, and 2) whether students evidencing problems in the early school years have received special supports intended to help them deal with these problems. **TIME FRAME**: Study conducted during the 1986-87 school year.

III. **The extent to which school practice, and school climate differ, in schools with different suspension statistics.** Central to this activity is developing an understanding of why suspension statistics vary from school to school and determining whether there are certain practices that have proven successful in some schools and might be helpful in others. **TIME FRAME**: Study conducted during the 1987-88 school year.

IV. **The effectiveness of innovative approaches to improving student behavior and reducing suspensions.** Building on the creativity of school-based staff and information acquired in the three activities described above, this activity looks at the extent to which new approaches, effective in reducing discipline problems, can be developed and implemented in MCPS. **TIME FRAME**: Study to be conducted during the 1988-89 school year.

These four activities are not independent but form a comprehensive and coordinated project that looks at all factors affecting suspensions. The Ad Hoc committee recommended that the first two activities be conducted by MCPS' Department of Educational Accountability (DEA). The third activity would be conducted by an outside contractor, and the fourth activity would be a joint venture between MCPS/DEA and an outside contractor.

APPENDIX B
FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY OF PARENTS

During the summer of 1987, the parents of the 219 multiple suspendees in the sample were surveyed by telephone. It was hoped that parent results would help explain why multiple suspendees misbehave. Of special interest were parent insights into early problems experienced by the suspendee, especially behavior in the elementary school grades. The parent interviews covered issues such as:

- o when parents thought their child's discipline problems began
- o what schools had done to improve their child's behavior
- o what parents had done to improve their child's behavior
- o factors that contributed the most to their child's discipline problems

Findings from the parent surveys, however, were somewhat of a disappointment due to the low survey response rate (37%). A number of factors contributed to the low response rate:

- o The survey was voluntary and parents were notified by mail two weeks prior to being called that they had the option to participate in, or not participate in, the survey. The advance notice seemed to increase the number of parents choosing not to participate.

- o Some parents (10 parents/5%) disputed the fact that their child had ever been suspended. These parents were not interviewed.

- o The suspendee sample proved to be an extremely mobile population, making it impossible to track down the correct phone numbers of many students.

The low response rate limits the degree to which the results can be generalized to parents of all multiple suspendees, and therefore the results are used only to supplement findings from the review of school data. Summarized on the pages that follow are parent responses to each survey question. As noted in the report, many of the findings are both positive and encouraging. Some of the findings worth noting are:

- o 54% of the parents felt as though they were always involved in the school's decision to discipline their child.

- o 63% of the parents said the school communicated enough to them about their child's behavior.

- o 71% of the parents remembered the first time their child got into serious trouble at school. The most frequently mentioned grade (the time of trouble) was the 7th grade, and the cause of trouble most frequently mentioned was fighting (mentioned by 37% of the parents).

- o Parents favored a variety of alternative punishments other than suspension from school, such as attending Saturday school detention (77%) or work detail (74%), attending counseling sessions (81%), or serving out some type of community service (70%) (e.g.,tutoring elementary students).

- o About a third of the parents said their child's "personality" and "peers" contributed the most to discipline and suspension problems.

Frequency Distribution For Parent Survey
(Total Number of Respondents = 79)

1. **What has MCPS done to help your child improve his/her behavior?**

Parent responses	(% mentioning)
School provided counseling	28%
School did nothing	28
School provided additional suspensions/punishments	16
School and parents could not agree on solutions	15
School provided alternative punishments (e.g., detention)	13
School assigned students to outside program (e.g., RICA)	11

2. **What kinds of things have you requested MCPS to do to help your child improve his/her behavior but for some reason nothing happened?**

Parent responses	(% mentioning)
Wanted counseling	6%
Wanted more discussion about problems	6

3. **What do you do at home to help improve your child's behavior?**

Parent responses	(% mentioning)
Punished child more	55%
Special attention given to child ("talked more")	45
Provided child and family with counseling	24
Make sure child did school work	16
Nothing worked with my child	8

4. **As a parent do you feel as though you have always been involved in the school's decisions to discipline your child?**

Percentage of parents saying yes	54%

How did the school involve you?

Parent responses	(% mentioning)
School calls a lot	28%
School frequently has conferences about child	25
School writes letters and notes	5
Counselor calls	5

5. **When your child got into trouble at school what types of punishments other than suspension were offered, or used?**

Parent responses	(% mentioning)
Detention	53%
Nothing else was offered	46

6. Does the school (current school) communicate enough to you about your child's behavior?

Percentage of parents saying yes 54%

How does the school communicate to you about his/her behavior?

Parent responses	(% mentioning)
Meetings	74%
Letters	23
Counselor calls	4

7. I'd like to get your opinion about some ways that students could be disciplined at school other than suspension. I'll state an alternative punishment and I'd like for you to tell me if you favor that punishment over school suspension. Keep in mind one important point, the punishment is being given because a student was either fighting another student or a teacher, or a student was disrespectful to a teacher.

	(% favoring)
a. attend Saturday school detention.	77%
b. attend Saturday school work detail (cleaning school grounds)...	74
c. attend counseling sessions.	81
d. assigned to community service (tutoring elementary students)...	70
e. complete a course dealing with social skills and self-control..	83
f. assigned to alternative school	28

8. Can you remember the first time your child was suspended from school or the first time he/she got into serious trouble at school?

Percentage of parents saying yes 71%

What grade was your child in? Most frequently mentioned grade: 7th

What happened at school?

Parent responses	(% mentioning)
Fighting	37%
Cutting school/cutting class	13
Fighting/arguing with teacher	12
Disrupting class	8

9. Were the above events related in any way to some other event in school or outside of school?

Percentage of parents saying yes 20%

Parent responses	(% mentioning)
Home life	11%
Personality problems	6

10. **Did this trouble change your child in any way?**

Percentage of parents saying yes	47%

Parent responses	(% mentioning)
Child went wild after suspension	18%
Child improved after suspension	8

11. **Overall, which of the following statements best describes your child's behavior in elementary school:**

	(% of parents)
a. disciplined rarely, once or twice	59%
b. disciplined occasionally, once or twice a year	35
c. disciplined regularly, several times a month	6
d. disciplined regularly, several times a week	0

12. **Overall, which of the following statements best describes your child's behavior in junior high school:**

	(% of parents)
a. disciplined rarely, once or twice	21%
b. disciplined occasionally, once or twice a year	39
c. disciplined regularly, several times a month	37
d. disciplined regularly, several times a week	3

13. **In general, which of the following statements best describes how your child got along with his/her teachers in elementary school?**

	(% of parents)
a. My child got along exceptionally well with his/her teachers	62%
b. My child had a few minor problems with his/her teachers but overall they got along okay (deportment was average)	35
c. My child rarely got along with his/her teachers (i.e., there were a lot of problems, some required my child to be suspended from school)	3

14. **In general, which of the following statements best describes how your child got along with his/her teachers in junior high school?**

	(% of parents)
a. My child got along exceptionally well with his/her teachers	16%
b. My child had a few minor problems with his/her teachers but overall they got along okay (deportment was average)	57
c. My child rarely got along with his/her teachers (i.e., there were a lot of problems, some required my child to be suspended from school)	27

15. In your opinion, what one thing, more than anything else, contributed the most to your child's discipline and suspension problems in MCPS?

Parent responses	(% mentioning)
Child's personality	37%
Peers	33
Home life	17
Teacher conflicts	12
Fighting	7
Drugs	6